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A MOMENT'S MISTAKE

R·H·HOLT-LOMAX

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★R R.Bowker

A
**MOMENT'S
MISTAKE**

BY
R. H. HOLT-LOMAX

** * * In the meantime all are of one family, and love each other; so that the two lateral buds do not stoop aside because they like it, but to let their more favored brother grow in peace * * **

“Modern Painters,” RUSKIN.

THE
Abbey Press

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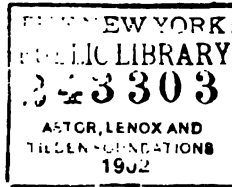
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A MOMENT'S MISTAKE.

PROLOGUE.

A WINTER evening in London, and, in the dining-room of a house in Harley Street, two men had finished dinner. Everything—from the stocks round their necks and the straps of their trousers, together with each hideous and costly article of furniture—proclaimed the period in which they lived. Early Victorian was stamped upon the florid pattern of the carpet, and on the ornaments and gilding of the room. But though their dress bespoke a date, the ages of the men themselves were not so easy to determine, except that both were past their prime. Close by them, with the dessert and wine upon it, stood the table they had left to sit in their armchairs.

"Harry," said one, who seemed to be the elder of the two, "you are not drinking. Help your-

self. And so," he continued, as the other filled his glass, "you have at last returned. A few weeks sailing on the seas and you are here in this old world again."

"Say, rather, the new world," and the speaker jerked his head. "They are very old out there."

"Well, have it your own way. In any case, you have come back, still in the vigour of life, a wiser and a richer man."

Harry Weatherston laughed.

"And," continued his friend, "wise enough to get a wife, and rich enough to keep her."

So saying, Edward Dane glanced at the tanned, weather-beaten face beside him. Weatherston was just the age to marry and to settle down, in his opinion, to give up this roaming, useless life he led, and stay at home and cultivate respectability. Something of this which was passing in the elder's mind the other may have noticed, for he changed the subject.

"About yourself, Ned!" he exclaimed; "your wish has been gratified, I understand, and I congratulate you. Tell me, when did the happy event take place?"

Edward Dane rubbed his hands together.

"Yes, yes, I have a boy at last—a boy at last;"

and he lingered on the words as he repeated them.

"But the day of his birth, man?" pursued his friend, "and the hour?"

"To be sure," replied the happy father. "Let me see, to-day is Wednesday. Monday last," he added, "in the morning, about five o'clock."

"Now, if we were in the East," said Harry Weatherston, reflectively, "do you know what we should do?"

"Can't say."

"Why, cast the boy's horoscope, of course, gaze into the future, and foretell the fate of Master Dane of Norbury."

A short silence followed, while across the father's face swept incredulity, then doubt, and finally uncertainty. These feelings found expression in his next remark:

"Harry, old friend, I have never liked to dabble in such things. Do not put them in my mind, I beg."

His companion shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he said. "I was afraid it would not meet with your approval."

All the same, thought Weatherston, give people fifty years, and they would take a different

view. Then they might be glad enough to take advantage of this very science of astrology they now affected to despise.

But, as a passion, curiosity in men and women yields in strength to none, and, now his friend appeared disposed to let the matter drop, Dane felt his prejudice against it waver. There was no harm, at any rate, in hearing something more about it.

"You see," he said to Weatherston, "this is all Greek to me."

The other paused a moment before answering.

"Ned," he said, at length, "I understand your prejudice, and think it very natural. You and my young nephew there, at Churston, are eldest sons, and so are well provided for. What folly, then, for you and such as you, to search for new ideas when fortune has been kind already! But with us it is a different matter, and we who live from day to day must snatch our opportunities."

"You mean that there is something really to be gained by this astrology?"

"Certainly," said Weatherston. "As a guide to the affairs of life, for instance, and as an encouragement in cases where a little nerve is necessary. Also, as a warning and a help in

staving off misfortune and disease, I do believe in it."

"And you wish to cast my boy's horoscope?" said Edward Dane.

But he eyed the other doubtfully while speaking, as though afraid that Weatherston might have designs upon the child.

"Because you are my friend, I will, and as it may some future time prove useful to your son."

No more was said upon the subject then, and they discussed the many things that had occurred the years of their long separation. Harry Weatherston had just returned from India, where he had seen service with the John Company. On the other hand, a country gentleman of large property, Edward Dane had spent the interval in sport and out-of-door amusement. Each, therefore, had his own experiences to give, and much to tell his friend. Engrossed in such like talk, the hours flew by unnoticed, and two o'clock had struck when Weatherston took leave.

"When will you dine with me again?" inquired his host.

"This day week," replied the other, and understood the motive of the question.

Accordingly a few days later, as arranged, the two men met again. The room and the hour were the same, and nothing had changed but the food and the port on the table. Dane, in a state of nervous excitement he could not conceal, pressed the wine upon his guest. Dinner he hardly touched at all, and made a mere pretence of eating, the while he wondered at the other's appetite. Yet, when they were once more in their old positions by the fireplace, he hesitated to begin.

"I won't keep you," said Weatherston, observing his old friend's uneasiness. "I know what you are thinking of, and will tell you all I can. To be honest, though, and to confess the truth, I am rather puzzled."

"Is it bad, then?" inquired the father, anxiously.

"No; but, again, it is not good. Curious—that is the word which best describes it."

Dane looked expectant.

"Your son," continued Weatherston, "was born in the sign of Sagittarius."

"Oh, drop your technical jargon, Harry, and come to the point! Tell me what I want to know about my boy."

"From what is revealed by the planets, the child will have a prosperous life until the age of twenty-one; then a great change is shown."

"Then a great change is shown," repeated his listener.

"About this time a new association comes into his life; an intimacy with one of the opposite sex—a pale girl with red hair—is shown. A marriage is revealed between them, which will have unfavorable results for him. Hers is an evil influence."

The father sat silent.

"No doubt," Weatherston went on, "this should explain what follows, for, further, it is shown your son goes far away to live."

"Absurd!" declared the other, starting up. "My son leave Norbury? Ridiculous! Impossible! Let me tell you, friend, you fellows who go traveling round pick up some mighty strange ideas. What on earth should take the boy away from home, I want to know? Every one is not a gad-about like Harry Weatherston."

"He will return."

"I hope so, indeed," muttered Dane.

"He will return," said Weatherston, impassively, "but not to stay. Hush!" he added, as

the other made a movement, "that is what puzzles me. The absence of a motive for these journeyings is most perplexing. No crime is shown on his part, and no explanation can be given for his sudden flight."

"It is all a lie, sir!" and the blood rose in the father's face with rage. "A trick of yours to frighten me!"

For a few minutes Edward Dane stood scowling at his friend, and then, as though ashamed of this display, he broke out petulantly:

"Harry, what made you tell me this?"

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," Weatherston said, gravely; "very sorry. You forget, Ned, that the subject interests me intensely, and I was anxious to find out about your son. Besides, knowing what you do now, the danger may be averted or, at least, precautions taken. Do not be cast down. As far as I can see, the Danes of Norbury will flourish and never be extinct, if that is what disturbs you."

And with this consolation, vague and meagre as it was, the father had to rest content. His friend gone, old Dane paced up and down the room half doubtful what to think, but most uneasy and depressed. For Harry Weatherston

had left him with the vision of a face he must perforce consider in the interests of his son. His recollection brought to mind the pictures he had seen in Belgium, Spain and Italy, when travelling in his youth. In one of these galleries he remembered the portrait of a girl had haunted him, as if in anticipation of the part she was about to play in future years. She could supply that very type his friend had just now sketched in hasty outline for his benefit: the pallid face, decided chin, and eyes that looked straight out at you beneath the red-gold hair. Not the kind of face, he considered ruefully, a man advanced in years and peacefully inclined would choose for his companion. Still, to dismiss her and her presence was impossible, in view of his one son.

CHAPTER I.

"SYLVIA," said Mr. Weatherston to his daughter one morning at breakfast, "I have some news for you."

News was scarce enough at Churston Rectory, and therefore welcome. One glance, however, at her father's face was now sufficient for the girl, and checked the laughing rejoinder on her lips. His serious expression, together with the hesitation in his manner, made her anxious.

"Oh, papa, what is it?"

"We have been very happy here," he replied, "you and I, alone."

"Yes, yes!"

She was afraid it must be something bad, and only wished her father would be quick and get it over. Meanwhile, Mr. Weatherston had left the table, and now stood with his back toward the fireplace.

"You need not look so frightened, child," he began; "it is nothing terrible. Merely that I

have been a good deal worried lately, and am considering what to do. The fact is, Sylvia, I am pressed for money, and must find a means to make some or else let this house."

Let the house, leave the place where she had been so happy all her life! The cheery, well-furnished room, the breakfast table with its silver service, and the strip of sunny lawn beneath the blinds drew her attention. For the first time Sylvia realized the comforts of these details which surrounded her and made her home so pleasant.

"Well, well," continued Mr. Weatherston, who had been watching her, "it won't come to that, I hope. Still, as I said before, what with the tithes in arrears and increasing expenses, something must be done. I have decided, therefore, to take pupils."

"Pupils here, papa?"

"Why not? Hewlett, to whom I spoke about it, quite agrees with me, and thinks the plan a good one."

At this name, Sylvia turned aside to hide her face from observation. John Hewlett was her father's curate, and a great admirer of the girl. Indeed, a kind of informal engagement had ex-

isted for some time between them, unknown to Mr. Weatherston; Jennie Adams, an old nurse of Sylvia's, and now housekeeper, being as yet the only person in their confidence.

"In any case," pursued the rector, "two pupils at a time will be my limit."

"Two are all the house will hold, papa," the girl replied, laughing, "unless you turn me out."

They were wonderfully alike, this parson and his daughter, although she was but eighteen and he was well on fifty. Both had the same red hair, which, streaked with gray upon his head, was golden yet on hers. Alike, too, were their pale complexions and dark hazel eyes. But there resemblance ceased, for the weakness of the parent's face was altogether absent from his child's.

"If Hewlett calls this afternoon," said Mr. Weatherston, "ask him to wait for my return. He has been kind about this matter of tuition, and has promised me his help. Myself, I shall go over and see Charles."

Meanwhile, not far from the Rectory and its occupants, John Hewlett paced his little strip of farm-house garden in a happy frame of mind. His thoughts were full of Sylvia, and of future

plans for married life. Great had been his delight when Mr. Weatherston consulted him with reference to teaching. Of course he would assist the rector, and do all he could to coach the lads. To him it seemed that fortune had been kinder than he dared to hope. No class work would be drudgery with Sylvia at hand. Willingly would he slave away with any number of young men, if by so doing he could be near the girl.

Unlike the rector, Hewlett had no influence in his profession. The youngest son of a wealthy squire, Mr. Weatherston had found life a very comfortable experience. His wife had died, indeed; but bitter as her loss had been, that lady left a daughter to take her place. With the curate, on the contrary, the position which he held was due entirely to his own exertions. A yeoman in the Midlands, old Hewlett had expected that his son would take to farming. But John, though fond of country life, had shown an early inclination for the church. And here at Churston, his first curacy, the young man met Miss Weatherston to fall in love with her.

That afternoon, as Hewlett walked toward the Rectory, a dozen things occurred to him to tell

the girl. How well he knew the way which led straight from the farm-house lodgings to her home; over the hill and down again the other side, into the Churston valley, where the sparrows rose in hurried clusters from the young and growing corn; and further on to where a bridle path branched off and took him by a short-cut to the Rectory grounds. There he soon found Sylvia, by her muslin gown, among the shrubs and laurels.

"John," she said, their greetings over, "we have the afternoon all to ourselves. Papa has gone to visit Uncle Charles, and wants to see you later."

"You are looking out of sorts," he said, presently. "What is the matter?"

In truth the girl was not herself, for she had quarreled with her nurse. On going to inform the latter, after breakfast, of the new arrangement, Hewlett's name was mentioned. Jennie by no means approved the curate's affection for her young mistress, and frankly told her so. Therefore, Sylvia now begged her lover to be careful and to humor the old woman.

"Papa thinks so much of her," she added, "and something tells me, John, that we shall want a friend."

He promised, as he would have promised anything to her, and then approached the subject near his heart. When should he speak to Mr. Weatherston and secure the rector's sanction to their marriage? To his surprise, the girl demurred.

"You see, dear," he explained, "as an honorable man, I ought to speak at once. This new plan will throw us more together, and Mr. Weatherston should know."

But Sylvia shook her head and did not see it. Directly John informed the rector, every vestige of romance would go, nor was the girl quite sure her father would approve.

"Cannot we go on like this," she pleaded, "just a little while?"

Hewlett listened, but he felt that his companion was wrong. Yet so great was his affection the fear of any disagreement with her made a coward of him. Gradually he allowed Sylvia to overrule his better judgment, and to persuade him. With feminine invention she discovered many reasons to excuse his conduct. Cleverly she pointed out that as their marriage was impossible at present, it would be silly to attract attention by a long engagement. So he consented.

This question shelved to Sylvia's satisfaction, the couple fell to building castles in the air—what they should do when, obstacles removed, they were once man and wife. With the old-fashioned Rectory as a model, they laid foundations for their future home. The faults of the quaint white house which stood in front of them now disappeared as though by magic in the one they built. In their enthusiasm minute particulars received attention. There was to be no trouble with the water pipes, for instance, or any worries of that kind. Then, in the summer time, when he could get away, how delightful it would be!—a tour in Switzerland most likely, or perhaps, if they had money, a run down south to Italy.

Tea came and found the couple still engaged in day-dreams. An informal meal at Churston Rectory, they did not wait for Mr. Weathers-ton, and had nearly finished when he joined them.

"Glad to see you, Hewlett," said the rector, sitting down. "I have famous news for both of you, as Charles has found a pupil. An old friend of Uncle Harry's, Mr. Dane of Norbury, wants a tutor for his son. This gentleman is

very feeble, I believe, and does not wish the lad to go far off."

"How fortunate!" exclaimed Sylvia.

"Besides what Charles has told me," continued her father, "I know a little of these Danes myself. Some years ago I stayed with Stiles, the vicar there, and we drove over to their place. A fine, modern house it was, with all the new improvements. Churston Hall is not to be compared with it a moment. Why, the courtyard, they say, alone could hold a troop of horse."

Each listener was affected differently, for while the curate fidgeted and half rose to go, the girl was all attention.

"And then," Mr. Weatherston went on, warming to his subject, "if only half the London dealers knew the treasures locked up in the country out of sight! The gardens, too, I saw enough of from the windows to convince me they were worthy of the house. Young Dane will have a fine inheritance."

"It must be beautiful!" said Sylvia, softly.

The rector's rapid sketch had fallen like a douche upon his daughter's dream. Her little house of cards seemed mean and insignificant by side of such magnificence. Water pipes and

cheap trips to Switzerland, how distasteful they appeared! Instinctively, and though the action made her hate herself, she found her eyes rest on John Hewlett critically. His well-worn coat seemed shabby, and his hair, she thought, unkempt and long. If he was like that now—Sylvia stopped with shame and tried to think of something else; of how good the other was, and what an upright man, and of how he loved her greatly.

"When," asked the curate, "do you expect this 'heir of Lynne'?"

There was a ring of bitterness about his tone which Sylvia noticed.

"Mr. Hewlett!" she exclaimed, "you are unkind, comparing papa's new pupil to a spendthrift."

The curate laughed, and, bidding the Weatherstons good-by, prepared for his walk home. But the exhilaration of the early afternoon had gone, to leave him dispirited. What the rector had just told them, coming as it did upon that talk with Sylvia, disturbed the young man much. That the girl would draw comparisons between the home he could provide and Norbury, was certain. He dreaded any contact with the out-

side world, afraid that it would spoil her for a quiet life. Looking through his window later, at the hill which hid the Rectory from sight, John Hewlett strove in vain to shake this feeling off.

CHAPTER II.

THE study at Churston Rectory was a pleasant room, and had of old been set apart for Mr. Weatherston. Under the new régime, the pupils were allowed to use it, and now sat there at work. Of these two, one, a lad of pleasant face, neither plain nor handsome, was the Edward Dane already mentioned. His companion, Thomas Saunders by name, was a youth of different appearance, much darker, with black hair. Both had laid aside their books a moment, and were engaged in conversation.

"I can't think," young Dane was saying, "why the governor sent me here. If it were not for the girl, I would do a bolt to-morrow."

"The girl?" repeated his fellow pupil, in a tone of much contempt. "Just fancy bothering about her, with all the summer meetings coming on. Look here, Ned, I will lay you four to one in sovereigns against Black Diamond for the big race Wednesday."

The speaker's father was a racing man of some consideration, and had inspired his son with the same taste.

"Short price, Tommy," replied the other.

"So like the public that," said Saunders; "always expect to get the exact quotation in the papers."

"All right, I'll take the bet," said Dane, indifferently.

"And now, look here; about the show this afternoon at Churston. Miss Weatherston is going to drive with me, and you are not to come. See?"

"Right you are," replied the other, briskly.

Barely six weeks had elapsed since the arrival of these young gentlemen at Churston. Still, short as the time had been, Mr. Weatherston's experiment bid fair to be successful.

Sylvia, who had rather dreaded the intrusion of two strangers, soon grew accustomed to their presence in the house. Even Jennie Adams was forced to admit there was less "worrying" about the place than she expected.

The show, as Dane described it, was a garden party given by the rector's brother, Charles Weatherston. Young Ned had Sylvia to him-

self on this occasion, for her father was unable to accompany them. Rid, too, of the society of Saunders, it was not long before the pair were on their way and driving through the country lanes. Seated high up in the dog-cart, free of dust, the girl's eyes sparkled from the sense of motion. Soon she began to talk, and found a ready listener in the lad. Short as was the time when Churston Hall and its brick walls showed through the trees, the couple had made great strides to friendship. They had so many tastes in common. Fond of animals and pets, the young man told her of the dogs and horses which were his favorites at home. Warming to the subject, Dane spoke of Norbury and of his father, and the jolly life they led. Listening to her companion, Sylvia thought it must be nice indeed to have no trouble about money, to have carriages and horses, and heaps of servants ready at one's beck and call. Dane was a man, but if she were in his place, what lovely jewelry she would buy! No need then to mind what people said about your clothes, or to wonder if last year's frock was recognized; and no occasion to furbish up the things you were so tired of and longed to throw away.

Such were the girl's reflections as they arrived before the door of Churston Hall, an old Georgian house, whose plain sash windows lent an air of comfort to the building. Inside the entrance hall was cool and comfortable, with walls adorned by Uncle Harry's Indian curios. Here Sylvia found John Hewlett waiting. Coming from the clouds down to reality, the curate did not appear to great advantage in her eyes.

"Why, John," she said, "how you do follow one about!"

The words had scarcely left her lips, when Sylvia was sorry for their utterance, and tried to make amends:

"Take me to the tennis grounds," she said, "and see if we can get a game."

Walking by his side, the girl watched her companion closely. From his expression she knew well he was dissatisfied with her, and out of temper. Would he take advantage of this opportunity to press her to a definite and final promise? Of late, while meeting daily at her father's house, no further mention had been made of their engagement. But this was neutral ground. What answer should she give him if he asked her now? True, the curate had her

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love, but there were other things besides, she had begun to think. Beautiful things, which made life so smooth and pleasant, and which, alas! she could not do without. But how could she explain all this to John, and what would he think of the admission? When she married it must be to sell herself, of that there was no question. In vain she might assure herself that love and money both would be her motive; that was impossible; the man she loved was Hewlett.

"This way," the other said. "We can get round here."

Before them lay a well-kept lawn, dotted over with young trees as specimens; firs and pines, which were as children to Charles Weatherston, who came to watch and tend them daily.

"Let us go back," the girl said, nervously, "and watch the people."

"Sylvia," he replied, disregarding her protest, "we must come to some decision."

Hewlett's manner, and the tone of assumption in these words, irritated his companion.

"Must we?" she said, indifferently. "Why?"

"I will tell you," he replied, with rising anger. "A short time back I promised, foolishly enough, I think, not to tell your father, but to wait.

Then I thought you loved me, but now you do not seem to care."

As Sylvia stood there, silent and undecided what to say, a fear stole over the young man that she had indeed changed her mind, that this was no mere lovers' quarrel.

"You are not yourself," he went on, more gently. "There is something on your mind which makes your manner to me different. What is your reason for treating me like this?"

"You want a reason," she exclaimed, "and I will give you one. I want to know how we can live if we are married? You have no money, so you told me, and I most certainly have not."

Crude as the words were, Sylvia could not control them in her excitement. But, conscious they might wound him, she continued speaking, to divert attention.

"John, I did not mean to hurt you by what I said. Indeed, not; but lately I have been thinking of us both—of you and me in years to come, when we two should be getting poor and poorer. At night sometimes I lie awake, and, wicked as it is, these thoughts will come to me. Other thoughts I have besides, and they take me to places where the sun shines and the people

smile; where there are good things to eat and music to listen to, and new clothes to wear. Forgive me, John, I cannot help it, indeed, I cannot."

A gray shade crept across her listener's face as she was speaking.

"Is it really so?" he asked the girl, when she had finished. "What a confession! But, no! this is all fancy, and not my Sylvia talking."

"No," she replied, "it is what I think."

"Sylvia, have you forgotten so soon?" He looked at her anxiously and expectantly.

"No," she repeated; "but I cannot help feeling like that."

"Perhaps we had better return."

His voice was hard, and they turned back in silence. Presently Hewlett stopped and held out his hand.

"Good-by," he said.

"Good-by," said Sylvia, faintly.

She watched him walk away, and then moved on toward the house. The evening sun was shining on its mellow walls and on the gravel sweep in front. Conveyances of different kinds stood waiting for their owners. Among these

she saw the dog-cart which had brought them, and in it was young Edward Dane.

Driving slowly back to spin out the time in Sylvia's society, the lad was much at sea. Could this be the same girl who had laughed and talked with him two hours ago? In vain Dane tried the best he could to restore her former spirits; the other wished him anywhere but at her side. Had she known in what direction Hewlett went, or seen him in the fields they passed, Sylvia would have left the cart at once and gone straight there to meet him.

Jennie was waiting on the doorstep of the Rectory when they returned, and came forward with a smile to greet them. For a reason she could not explain, Sylvia blushed, and, angry with herself for doing so, went indoors hurriedly. With a curtsey as a prelude to conversation, the old nurse began to chat with Dane. Had it been a pleasant party, she would like to know, and were many of the gentry there? The other, anxious to be off, answered her questions shortly.

"How did you think Miss Sylvia was looking, sir?" she asked at length, seeing Dane about to go.

"Very well, I think. She always does."

The old woman stood with folded arms and lips pursed for an effort.

"If so be she did, it was for you."

And before the lad had quite recovered his astonishment at this remark, she turned and left him.

Clumsily as Jennie Adams had put in her word, it was not without effect. The vanity of the boy of twenty is not so difficult to flatter, especially where women are concerned. A pleasant glow came over Dane, and his opinion of the fair sex underwent another change. No man, much less a youth, resents the notice of a pretty girl.

Here, then, was the explanation of Sylvia's manner coming home. Naturally, after they had got on so well together, she was annoyed at being left with Hewlett all the afternoon. No doubt she thought he might have spared a little time for her instead of playing tennis. Well, if so, he must try and make it up with her again. From what the nurse had said just now, the girl would probably forgive him. Poor Saunders! What a lot he lost with his absurd ideas of women!

Supposing, thought Dane, pursuing his reflections, he were to ask the girl to marry him, what would his father say? The old man, he was sure, could not object, once he had seen Sylvia.

Besides, the Weatherstons were good enough for any one, and had been settled in the county many years. No; there was nothing on the score of birth or looks to prevent their marriage in the governor's eyes. One thing might prove a nuisance, certainly; they might consider him too young. Well, if they did, he must wait until he came of age, and could then do as he pleased. Other fellows had married when no older than he was, and why should he not do the same?

CHAPTER III.

SYLVIA was not surprised, a few days later, when her father told her John Hewlett was about to leave them. To all appearances, Mr. Weatherston was the most affected of the two, and secretly he wondered at the girl's indifference. Had he seen her crying afterward it would have caused him pain and genuine astonishment.

One person in the Rectory did not share in this regret. Jennie Adams was very pleased to find the curate going. Once out of the way, with his influence over her young mistress, her own plans could mature. To bring matters to a head with Mr. Hewlett there was quite impossible, she knew. Now that he was leaving, the girl would be herself again. To settle Sylvia well in life had been the one great ambition of the nurse, but opportunities to do so had hitherto been wanting. Now the arrival of Edward Dane seemed, to use her own expression, "providential like."

The day of Hewlett's departure came, and he took leave of all at Churston. Waiting in the station presently, he was surprised when Sylvia appeared. She had been shopping, she explained, and, being near, had come to see him off.

"Miss Weatherston," he said, "we will let bygones be bygones. The other day I told myself no power on earth should make me speak to you again. Such thoughts are wrong, and we must think more kindly of each other."

The girl nodded, for she could not trust herself to talk. To relieve the tension of their parting, Hewlett described the East End parish he was going to in London. The picture which he drew was not a pleasant one, and it frightened Sylvia.

"Why do you go?" she faltered, and then ceased. Their eyes met, and he made a movement forward.

"Churston! Churston!" sang out the porter.

And so it was too late. Returning home, Sylvia repeated this again and again to herself. Recent discontent seemed better almost than her present helplessness now that his affection was withdrawn. The girl's depression did not es-

cape the notice of the nurse, who waylaid her coming in.

"Has he gone?" she inquired of Sylvia, eagerly. "Don't think of him again, my dear. I think you have done right, and should have told you so before, but wished to spare your feelings."

"I little thought," the girl replied, "when you asked me to have patience, that this would ever happen."

"Nor I. And now, my dear, I have a bit of news. Julia wrote me a line this morning, and where do you think she is?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"Why, she's taken service with old Mr. Dane at Norbury, the father of our young gentleman."

"Yes!" and the girl looked up with interest.

Rapidly, and as if she enjoyed it, Jennie Adams repeated the contents of her sister's letter, describing in detail the house and furniture, the grounds and the number of servants kept in the establishment. Nor did the nurse in her account underrate the glowing sketch of the enthusiastic Julia. In conclusion she looked at her listener and said:

"That is the place for you, Miss Sylvia."

The girl colored at the insinuation.

"Don't be absurd, Jennie!" she said.

In her heart, all the same, Sylvia did not think it so ridiculous. The idea was not a new one, for it had occurred to her time and again since that day her father mentioned Norbury. Still, the thought was hitherto her own, and, spoken out, it startled her.

The nurse said no more, for at the present she had done as much as she considered wise. Boy and girl each had had a hint from her sufficient to encourage any inclination they might have already.

As though to further Jennie's hopes, the rector heard from old Mr. Dane. Anxious for his son to "go up" to Cambridge the next October term, the latter asked if Mr. Weatherston would keep the lad and coach him in the holidays. Glad enough to make a little money without much extra work, Sylvia's father readily consented. This arrangement left the girl alone with Dane, as Saunders left for his vacation.

Of the days which then followed in such quick succession, and in the society of the girl he grew to love, Dane will think as of the happiest time

he ever passed. Work in the morning over, made the freedom afterward the more delightful. Sylvia, too, caught the infection of this easy life, and joined with equal zest in all amusements. Of these they had a great variety. At times they would play tennis in the pleasant Rectory grounds, and, tired of that, would gather fruit in the old kitchen garden. There among the walnut and the mulberry trees, swinging in their hammocks, they would talk and read. At other times Dane took the rector's cart, or hired one in the village, and with Sylvia visited the country fairs in that part of the neighborhood. Sometimes, again, they would take a boat upon the little river and drift between the corn fields on the banks each side. Dane with his banjo would try to play accompaniments while his companion sang—attempts which would subside in laughter, for neither of them was proficient. And then the picnics, when they feasted gayly on what Jennie had provided, passing the hours like children, as they were.

The village gossips were much exercised about their parson's daughter and young Edward Dane. Would any one, they asked, tell Mr. Weatherston of what was going on? Surely it

could not be right for a young lad and lassie to be so much together! As for Jennie Adams, poor creature! they knew her of old, and had never set much store by her. Such was the opinion of the women of Churston, as they discussed the matter with the other doings of the neighbors. For this purpose, and for the pleasant interchange of scandal, there is no time like a summer's day. The sun drags people out somehow, and loosens tongues and makes their owners talkative.

Unconscious of the interest they roused in these good folk, Sylvia and Dane enjoyed themselves without respect to anybody. Not a word came all this time to spoil their Eden. Practically, they might have been in the Pacific Islands, or any other place which is both pleasant and uncrowded. It was as if a breathing space had been allotted to them ere their troubles came, and they had been forewarned to profit by the present. Sylvia was enabled to forget her love, and with the lad it was the same. For, carried away by the birth and growth of feelings new to him, Dane had forgotten both his father and the future. Conscious only of Sylvia and his immediate surroundings, he had postponed those

thoughts with a vague assurance to himself that things would work out right.

Nor had they anything to fear from the other inmates of the Rectory. Engrossed in his books and parish work, Mr. Weatherston paid little heed to what went on around him. Some men there are like this who, where their female belongings are concerned, appear most strangely blind. To them it is a matter of intense surprise that these should form attachments to or be admired by men. That Sylvia might fall in love with any one had never once occurred to Mr. Weatherston. There remained Jennie Adams, and she, of course, was well content and satisfied.

One morning the rector announced a letter from John Hewlett. The curate wrote in good spirits, and seemed from his account to like the new life he was leading. In conclusion he sent Miss Weatherston his kind regards. Although she knew of no other message he could send, Sylvia was annoyed. After what had passed between them at the last, she expected something less conventional. To be sure, he had written through her father, which perhaps explained it, but why did he not write to her direct, for at

least they parted friends? Evidently with Hewlett it was love or nothing. Well, she had expressed herself clearly enough, and if he chose to sulk she could not help it. His absence had not affected her so very much, when all was said and done. She was going to marry Edward Dane, and no one should prevent her—going to have a gay time, instead of being cooped up in a country village. Other girls enjoyed themselves, and she would do so, too. Afterwards, perhaps, when they had settled down, Hewlett might come and stay with them. She would like that.

In spite, however, of this compromise, Sylvia found her thoughts dwell more and more upon the absent one. Jennie Adams also became uneasy as the time flew by and the announcement she expected was delayed. The nurse began to fear the girl's affection for the curate was greater than she had supposed. Dane even consulted her with reference to Sylvia.

"I don't know, nurse," he said, "what is the matter with Miss Weatherston. At first she was as jolly as possible, but now she has quite changed."

"Girls are like that, sir," she had replied. "It is a sign they are in love."

A curious way to show it, thought the lad. All the same, he could not stand this sort of thing much longer, and would get it over soon. What a fool he was to wait so long, when there had been so many opportunities.

Great, therefore, was the relief to Jennie Adams when Sylvia, pale and unembarrassed, confessed the nurse's wishes had been realized. To the congratulations of her old friend the girl replied :
"I hope I have done right."

The other did not approve of this remark, and speedily she reassured her mistress. Sylvia was her own sweet child, and of course she had done right. What a future would be hers as Mrs. Dane of Norbury! Houses and diamonds—again the nurse described the many new possessions Sylvia would acquire.

The girl let her run on. The plunge taken, and Edward Dane accepted, all this which Jennie catalogued with such appreciation was but the change she, Sylvia, would gather from the counter in return for value received. Value received—and she was little better than a thief disposing of the property just stolen. The original owner of her heart—when he returned how should she face him?

But her companion was inquisitive, and anxious to hear a few particulars.

"What did Mr. Dane say, my dear?" she inquired, "and did he mention his father?"

"No. What he said was simply that he loved me, and would I marry him? As you know, I said yes, and there the matter ended. So strange, it all seemed as though he were my brother. When Ned kissed me, it was odd, somehow. You see this ring. Well, he put it on my finger, and I admired it, saying it was pretty. After that we were silent. He sat looking at me all the time and I just poked holes in the ground with my stick."

"It don't sound very lover-like to me," observed her confidante.

"Yes, it was, Jennie. We both did our very best, and I am positive Ned loves me, in his way. A pity——"

"What?"


"A pity he is not older."

At first the nurse appeared perplexed by such a wish, but then she laughed.

"It will come, Miss Sylvia, it will come."

CHAPTER IV.

THIS time they had changed places, and it was Sylvia's turn to carry news to Mr. Weatherston. With that air of indifference Jennie Adams had previously observed, the girl informed her father of her engagement to young Dane. Annoyed, like all men awakened rudely to a sense of duty unforeseen by them, the rector expressed his resentment forcibly. A quiet man, when once put out, he became feebly passionate and protesting. His feelings were much hurt, he said, at the complete want of confidence reposed in him. Did Sylvia think it right, he asked, to treat her father in this manner? All this and more his daughter was prepared for, and now she listened to him patiently. She knew the other better than he thought, and that his anger was short-lived as sudden. And so it was, for, as his irritation and surprise subsided, Mr. Weatherston began to think. The explanation which would follow with the father of



the boy was what he dreaded most. To a great extent he was responsible for what had happened. Old Mr. Dane might complain, with justice, that he, as tutor, should have seen, or taken note at least, of what the lad was doing. Such reproaches, of necessity, connected with his daughter, would be heard to bear.

On the other hand, he could not but acknowledge that the match was advantageous from a worldly point of view.

With the determination, therefore, to make the best of it, Mr. Weatherston spoke to his prospective son-in-law. His own consent, the rector carefully explained, depended solely on the sanction of the elder Dane. If this latter should approve the marriage, well and good, and their engagement might continue. For this purpose, he suggested that the lad had better go and see his father, taking Sylvia with him. Jennie Adams had asked leave to see her sister, and would accompany his daughter.

This arrangement made, all three set out for Norbury soon afterward. Up to this point the girl had shown great skill and management with Edward Dane and her own father. To the former she had tried to be affectionate, and to

the latter she was dutiful. But, as she now confessed in her own mind, this coming interview would be a different matter—an ordeal she would willingly postpone and which made her nervous and uneasy. To reassure herself, she recalled the particulars which Jennie gave about the property. What did it signify if this old man was disagreeable, when everything would one day be hers? Still Sylvia did not wish this cloud on her horizon, and earnestly she hoped to please old Mr. Dane.

"Tired?" asked the lad, who had been watching her.

"No, but very anxious, Ned," she said. "What shall I do if he dislikes me?"

"Dislike you? Why, the governor's the dearest old boy in the world. You will get on first-rate together."

Norbury lay close by the Hinton station, where they now alighted. A porter touched his cap to Dane.

"Your cart has not arrived yet, Mr. Edward," he said.

"No matter, we shall walk."

Leaving Jennie to come after, Dane hurried Sylvia through the little ticket office into the

sunny road beyond, anxious as he was to avoid the village loafers, and the attention his arrival caused. A few steps further and they were in a field of wheat, following the narrow path beside the corn. Still farther and they came in view of a great stretch of grass so green and smooth it seemed like one huge lawn. Between the oaks and cedars in a dip of ground the surface of a lake was sparkling in the sun. Beyond this water, and above the trees around it, rose the turret of a house in the Italian style. Down one side the mansion ran a terrace walk with beds of flowers laid out in colors all along. The whole effect was bright and gay, and came to Sylvia something like a fairy tale. Her depression vanished as by magic, and she gave a sigh of satisfaction. To Dane as well the sight of his own home, together with the sense of ownership, was reassuring. Fresh courage animated both as they proceeded on their way toward the house.

On their arrival at the entrance porch Dane tried the door inside, but found it locked. He rang impatiently.

"I never knew this done before!" he exclaimed.
"This door is generally kept open."

"Is it?" Sylvia answered, absently.

The girl was looking at her own reflection in the folding doors of glass, thinking she appeared both tired and dusty, and a great fright for Mr. Dane to see. She must have time to get away somewhere and tidy herself up. Another minute and a footman hurried forward with a scared expression.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, on seeing Dane, "the fact is, we are a bit upset. The master's had a fit and is upstairs in bed."

"Fit!" echoed Dane, and he remembered one his father had before.

"Yes, sir; we just managed to get him to his room. Doctor Rice is with him."

Sylvia and her companion exchanged glances of dismay. That foreboding of evil which had followed them was partly justified in this misfortune.

"I must go to him at once," said Dane.

Then, recollecting Sylvia was a stranger to the house, he asked the girl to wait for him downstairs.

"John, show this lady to the drawing-room."

Following her guide, Sylvia was too much bewildered by the recent turn events had taken to

notice much. The walls, she saw, were lined with pictures, and here and there the gleam of armor caught her eye. Close by her side, too, as she walked, stood inlaid cabinets, the interiors filled with curios and china.

"This, miss, is the drawing-room."

They stood within a large, oblong apartment, upholstered throughout in white and gold. The floor was of parquetry, but once upon the carpet in the middle Sylvia moved without a sound. An eerie feeling, as if she were walking down some empty gallery alone, oppressed her. As the servant closed the door, she felt a strong impulse to scream, and with difficulty she kept herself from calling out to him. Hurrying to the window, she chose a seat where there were light and air, and where the garden could be seen. By degrees, as she regained her confidence and grew accustomed to her new surroundings, Sylvia looked about her. On every hand and whichever way she turned were signs of wealth and taste. All this that she had longed for and desired would, then, be hers some day, and Jennie had not exaggerated in her description. At any other time she would have been up and about the room, examining its treasures. To explore the

place and bring to light the costly trifles in it would have been a pleasure. But now this grandeur, connected as it was with that old man upstairs, depressed the girl. His ghost, were he to die, would walk the house, she was quite sure. What if she had come too late, and he had ceased to live before she saw him?

In that case, when she married Ned the spirit of his father might descend, resenting her intrusion.

"Sylvia!"

Young Dane stood in the doorway beckoning.

"The governor is very bad," he said. "Had you not better return to Churston?"

"No, no," she said, imploringly. "Your father—I must see him. Do not you understand it would be something even to be with him a moment, to hold his hand, to feel that he and I were not quite strangers, whatever else might happen?"

"I will ask the doctor, dear."

"Even if he could not talk," she added, gravely, "our meeting would be a kind of sanction to the marriage."

A sound of footsteps reached them from the hall outside. Dane made a movement forward.

"That must be Rice," he said. "Wait here, and I will speak to him."

Listening with strained ears, the girl heard a voice, which said:

"Certainly. By all means let the young lady see him. Of course she must keep very quiet, and you will tell her so."

Up the broad staircase which branched off into a double flight half way, went Sylvia and Dane together, hand in hand to reassure themselves, for they were unaccustomed to calamity, and uncertain in its presence.

Quietly they approached the sick man's door, going in on tiptoe to avoid disturbance. At sight of the wizened face upon the pillow the girl felt no further hesitation, and she was filled with pity. Noiselessly she crept up to the bedside and laid her hand upon the frail one on the coverlid. Old Mr. Dane was lying back exhausted, with eyes half closed and which now opened at her touch. Bewildered for a moment, he greeted Sylvia with a vacant stare. By degrees his face became intelligent again, and showed surprise at seeing her. Then suddenly the whole expression changed and fell in terror—the look of one who saw the spectre which had

haunted him so long draw near in flesh and blood. Sitting up, the old man tried to free his throat, whilst those about him heard him mutter:

“Harry—Harry!”

The room was cleared of all except young Dane and the immediate attendants. Presently, as Sylvia sat disconsolate and miserable near by, a message came to her from Ned. What the purport of it was she guessed too well—old Mr. Dane had died.

Their lives had parted as they touched.

CHAPTER V.

THEY were married quietly the following spring in the quaint old town of Churstonbury, in the church that stands close by the great cathedral, like a child who nestles to the mother's side.

This death upon the threshold of the house she came to as her future home affected Sylvia deeply at the time. To efface that painful memory, and divert the current of her thoughts, Dane took his wife abroad. Paris was the place they chose, combining as it did amusement with a complete change of scene. In the excitement of this life, where everything was new to her, Sylvia soon regained her spirits. The gay breakfasts in the restaurants, the daily drives about the town and to the races in the neighborhood, amused her.

In the evenings they had the opera or a theatre to visit, and last, but not least, there were the shops. Nor did Sylvia lack admirers among the few acquaintances she and her husband

made. Conspicuous for his devotion to the young English wife, as he described her, was a Monsieur de Préville. And later, when Dane announced their intention of returning home, the Frenchman was disconsolate.

"No matter, it is but *au revoir*, madame," he said, standing by their coupé on the platform at the Gare du Nord, "and not *adieu*."

Sylvia smiled and nodded, feeling sorry they were leaving Paris. But the shooting season had commenced, and Edward Dane was anxious to return. Nor did his wife object to going home, their absence having cured her morbid feeling of the dead, together with her superstitions.

Norbury, on their arrival, looked a different house. They had left it in the autumn buried in a mass of changing foliage, and now everything was bare excepting evergreens and cedars. Inside, however, large fires made some amends, and brightened up the whole interior of the place. The dismal holland coverings which had concealed the furniture and made the rooms appear so chilly, were removed by Sylvia's orders. Walking to and fro and superintending the arrangements, the young wife ignored those fears

which had formerly oppressed her. The old delight in pretty things and their possession returned at sight of all within this house, that now belonged to her as mistress. The neighbors, too, soon came to see them, and these visits kept the couple fully occupied receiving and returning hospitality.

By and by, however, an event occurred which put aside all thoughts of gayety on her part for the present. The birth of a son gave Sylvia a fresh interest in life, and a new object for affection. This child was something of her very own on which to lavish all that love she could not feel for Dane.

For not a word had Sylvia heard from Hewlett all this time. To be sure, Mr. Weatherston, who came occasionally to see them, mentioned that the curate sometimes wrote. But his daughter thought she could not well apply to him for news of her old love. Resolutely, Sylvia tried to keep her mind from dwelling on the man, and to persuade herself she did not care for him.

Such was her resolve when some months after, reading the Churstonbury news, Sylvia saw an announcement in that paper which surprised her. To most people it would have seemed ordi-

nary enough, and a mere bit of local information. To Sylvia it was of absorbing interest. The bishop of the diocese, it ran, had offered the vacant living of Hinton to the Reverend John Hewlett. This intelligence, the least expected, dazed and rather frightened Sylvia, and immediately she fell to thinking of the consequences.

It was well enough to talk and reassure herself with John away and out of sight; but now that he would be so close, had she the courage to control herself? And this doubt gave her fear. Her husband saw the paragraph as well, and at once remarked on it.

"Good chap, Hewlett," he said, "and a good shot, too! I am glad he will be so near."

"Yes," said Sylvia.

"He must come and stay with us," continued Dane, "and we will introduce him to the neighbors."

"If you wish it," replied his wife. For the life of her she could say no more, and these words, even, were an effort.

He looked surprised.

"Why, Sylvia," he said, "you don't seem to care, and I thought you liked the man."

"I will write to-night," she replied.

They talked of other matters, and later, in the drawing-room, Sylvia wrote her note. It was a commonplace one enough, and expressed a hope that Mr. Hewlett could spare the time to visit them. She alluded also to the satisfaction with which they had received the news of his preference. To no ordinary acquaintance would Sylvia have written in such stiff fashion, but her very feelings to the man restrained the phrases of her letter. She would begin as she intended to go on, she told herself, and it was solely by request of Ned she wrote at all. Having addressed the envelope, Sylvia was about to place the note inside, when Dane's voice arrested her.

"Have you finished writing to Hewlett?" he asked.

"Not yet," she replied.

"Well, just add a postscript. Ask him to bring his gun."

She did so, and then looked back at her husband, reading there in an armchair. Why could she not love this man, and so end all her troubles satisfactorily? He was kind to her in a way, and loved her much, but still he was a boy. Had he been older, perhaps she could have explained

some things which lay so heavily upon her. But the blank manner in which he received all advances that were not physical disheartened her.

"Shall I play to you?" she said, smiling at him.

Dane's face brightened, and he jumped up from his chair.

"Capital, Sylvia," he cried out. "That book was rot!" and he flung the volume on a sofa.

Next day John Hewlett, sitting in his London lodgings, received the invitation. The bishop's offer he had accepted gladly, for, putting other things aside, he longed once more for country life. Sylvia's letter, coming after, made him realize as well how near the new arrangement would bring them to each other. But sure of himself, the curate had no fear their meeting would awaken former feelings. Long absence, he was pleased to think, had completely cured him of his old affection. The Danes, too, were the most important people in his future parish, so altogether Hewlett thought it wisest to accept. Still, travelling down to Hinton shortly afterward, a feeling of depression stole over him for which he could not account. In vain he tried to reason with this growing feeling of uneasiness,

for never so, he told himself, had Fortune smiled upon him more, or his prospects looked so bright.

The lights of Norbury at his journey's end compelled a change to livelier thoughts. Dane met him almost as the carriage which had brought him stopped. His host's cheery greeting was infectious, and Hewlett brightened.

"Welcome to Norbury," he said.

They paused a moment in the hall, then went on into the drawing-room.

"Here is an old friend, Sylvia," said her husband, as he followed up the new arrival.

With a slight flush only just perceptible upon her face, Mrs. Dane came forward to greet her guest. Each looked at the other with an appraising glance. The woman was the quicker, and at once put Hewlett down as changed. To the curate, on the contrary, his hostess seemed a well-dressed edition of the girl he had known formerly.

"We were pleased to hear of your good fortune," Sylvia began. "It would have been so disagreeable to have a neighbor we did not care for."

"And I was glad," said Hewlett, simply.

She looked at him again, but the former light

had left his eyes, and he was merely civil. Keenly she reproached herself for all the needless worry she had suffered. This feeling found expression later, as she was talking to her husband before dinner.

"He is terribly changed," she said. "I never did believe in slumming, and that is what he has been doing in that horrid East End."

Dane laughed.

"Hewlett looks pretty much the same, I think," he said. "He never was a beauty."

"I don't agree," said Sylvia, shortly. "He used to be good-looking."

Presently the curate joined them, and all three sat down to dinner. Sylvia apologized to Hewlett for the absence of all other guests.

"To-morrow," she added, "we expect some friends. To-night we intend to make the most of you."

In a pale-green gown, with white roses at her throat and in her hair for ornament, the young wife looked her best. Habit had rendered Dane more indifferent than he used to be, but to the other, Sylvia seemed a creature from another world. Involuntarily his eyes sought her direction more and more. The lights, the dinner and

the general comfort insensibly affected him. A glass of wine, and again he looked at his hostess. Try as he would to restrain himself, a rush of feeling such as he had been a stranger to for long passed through him. A mad longing to seize this woman in his arms came over him, for was she not his own first love, before this lad had interfered?

"There won't be much to do," Dane was saying. "To-morrow we will try for a few pheasants."

Sylvia had been watching Hewlett, and once, when she had looked at him, he had responded. To both, Dane, sitting there between them, might have been long miles away. In imagination once again they were standing on the Rectory lawn exchanging words of love together. Hewlett forced himself to address his host.

"Don't trouble to entertain me," he said. "I'm quite happy doing nothing."

"If you don't shoot to-morrow," Sylvia said, "I can take you driving."

Only two glasses of wine had he taken, thought Hewlett, and yet he felt intoxicated. Wine, forsooth, he knew better than that. No liquor gave a man the feeling of exhilaration which was

his that moment. Then, suddenly the bishop's words occurred to him: "It pleases me to make this offer to a man so much esteemed."

"Don't be long."

It was Sylvia leaving them, and Hewlett was alone with her husband. He drew a deep breath of relief. Once the woman was gone, he sat in vague astonishment at his infatuation. He looked at Dane beside him. Had the latter noticed?

"You must come over later, Hewlett, when you are at Hinton. We shall have a really good shoot then."

The two men talked a little while, and then sought Sylvia in the drawing-room. As they came in she cast a quick glance at them. During their absence she had considered Hewlett's manner toward her. Did he really love her still, for there had been moments just now when she thought he did?

"Quite like old times this," said Dane, addressing them. "If only Tommy were here the party would be complete."

"What is Saunders doing?" asked Hewlett, quickly. "He was to be a soldier."

The curate seized the opportunity to stave off

any further talk with Sylvia. He dared not trust himself and never realized how weak his resolution was until now.

"He is in the 'Fencibles,' " Dane answered, "at Baywater Dock."

"Come and talk to me, Mr. Hewlett," said Sylvia. "I want to hear of your experiences in London."

She had no idea of allowing him to ignore her even for a moment. Making a movement to give him room upon the sofa, she continued:

"It is a long time since we had a talk, but now I hope we shall have many."


Hewlett answered pleasantly, but dared not look at his companion. That madness in the dining-room just now had passed away, and must not be recalled. Sylvia attributed his answers to a different motive, and was well content to let the matter rest. Presently she left them to themselves.

Alone with Dane in the smoking-room, Hewlett took himself to task. Luckily his host expected friends to dinner the next day, and he could so avoid Sylvia without giving her offence. Strange that those feelings he had thought were overcome and buried should rise at the first test

to worst him—he who, above all men, had pride in his own power of self-control. Well, it should not occur again, of that he would make sure by leaving Norbury. To-morrow he would stay, and go away the following morning. When he came to Hinton as their neighbor all intercourse between himself and the Danes should cease, or not exceed the merest courtesy. These resolutions formed, the curate had a short chat with his host on sport before they went to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

A THICK fog greeted the inmates of Norbury when they awoke next morning. House and grounds were enveloped in a shroud through which the sun broke gradually. Breakfast was a tedious affair, passed in anxious hopes for an improvement in the weather. Dane fidgeted about the room, and his wife suggested music or a stroll round the conservatories. Toward eleven o'clock a change set in, and soon it cleared sufficiently for them to make a start. Unfortunately for her, it happened that this very day she most wished to be at liberty, Sylvia had to stay at home. No less a person than that inveterate gossip, Lady Rakesmire was lunching with her, and, secure of a good listener, the old lady might remain for hours. In vain Sylvia considered how to rid herself of this infliction quickly, that she might join the men. For at no time, so her husband said, would they be far from home, and, guided by the shots, she would soon find them.



From the windows of the drawing-room Sylvia watched them leave the house—these two men who between them had made up her life. One with whom her earlier memories were associated, and the other, whom she had sworn to honor and obey. There they went walking side by side across the park, their shadows black upon the grass, and their figures growing smaller in her sight. Once more had their three lives converged, and what would be the outcome of it all she could not say. One of the two might have to go, she told herself, and if so, which one should it be? For a moment Sylvia caught her breath, appalled at such a question, and at the recklessness which gave birth to it. The serious nature of the crisis to which she was now drifting startled and dismayed her. Here she was a married woman, and a mother, calmly speculating on the love she bore for these two men respectively, actually weighing another in the balance with her husband and the father of her child.

For now, as though placed there in front of her on purpose, Sylvia saw her son. Annette, the nurse, was wheeling him along the terraced walk which ran beside the ground-floor windows

of the house. The mere presence of her boy just then was a support to her. Never again should a motive for right conduct fail her, she determined, in the hour of need. There was a tie more than sufficient to restrain her, and which should be remembered in the future—Neddie, her son.

The clock striking in the stable turret reminded Sylvia of Lady Rakesmire and the coming ordeal. Not in the best of tempers at the prospect, she made haste to receive her guest by putting on a walking dress. This she thought might be a hint of her intention to go out again, and which she hoped the other would accept. But presently, when the old lady did appear, advancing briskly to meet her, Sylvia's spirits sank. Their first greetings over, the latter saw at once that it was one of Lady Rakesmire's days. In short, this meant her visitor would do all the talking, while she, Sylvia, must sit as patiently as possible and listen. Nor had she long to wait for a straightforward question.

"Where are the men?"

They were out shooting, Sylvia said, at the same time wishing she was with them.

"I am glad of that," continued Lady Rakes-

mire. "Men are a nuisance, when one wants a really serious conversation. By the by, my dear, who is staying with you now?"

A certain tolerance was accorded the old lady in the neighborhood, by reason of her rank and tongue. Her brusque manners and abrupt inquiries were accepted as the marks of eccentricity, and the natural outcome of a "character." All this Sylvia understood when she replied that they had only Mr. Hewlett with them at the present.

"Why," exclaimed her visitor, in feigned astonishment, "that is the man, is he not, who was curate to your father, and who has had this Hinton living given him?"

"Yes, the same."

Sylvia did not wish to discuss the curate, with a vivid recollection of the previous evening in her mind. Still less was she disposed to answer questions in the matter. For the rest, she did not know how much her guest had heard and credited. To her relief, as she was thinking thus, luncheon was announced. During the progress of the meal, and with the servants in the room, her visitor could not pursue the subject. So while she satisfied an excellent appetite, Lady

Rakesmire was comparatively silent, and confined herself to trivial remarks. Yet all the time Sylvia felt the other's eyes upon her, and dreaded further conversation presently. Jennie she could always confide in, but this old woman, with her dry smile and insinuating manner, frightened her. Lunch over at length, and back in the drawing-room, Sylvia glanced at the clock. Half past two. If only she could leave the house by three.

"Mr. Hewlett will be your nearest neighbor now," Lady Rakesmire commenced. "There is nothing like old friends."

"It was quite unexpected," said Sylvia; "his preferment, I mean. And no one was more astonished than Mr. Hewlett himself."

"Just so, and a pleasant surprise to all concerned."

Really, thought her hostess, this old lady with her innuendoes was intolerable. Or was it that she herself suffered from a guilty conscience and so was unduly sensitive?

"I don't know what you mean exactly by 'pleasant to all concerned,'" said Sylvia. "Of course, we have known Mr. Hewlett for some time."

The other nodded.

"Precisely, and I am an old woman, and, people often add, a meddlesome old woman. Let them, I don't care; but occasionally I do good turns, and that is why I called to-day."

Then it all came out. Lady Rakesmire, it appeared, had heard the gossip of the neighborhood with reference to Sylvia and the curate. Not that she paid heed herself, the good lady said, to these ill-natured rumors, but was it wise, she put it to the other, to have Hewlett staying with them?

Disgusted and angry, Sylvia listened until her visitor had finished. It was one thing to have her own private doubts, but quite another matter to receive outside reproof.

"You mean well, I dare say, Lady Rakesmire," she said; "but I am not the silly girl, let me tell you, that I was at Churston. And now," continued Sylvia, "please to say no more about it, and we will talk of something else."

But conversation languished after this. Indeed, it was difficult for Sylvia to feel at ease and comfortable with Lady Rakesmire, for well she knew that she herself would form the leading theme of any conversation the latter had

with friends. One satisfaction she did get, for the old lady rose to go much earlier than was usual.

Sylvia did not wait to see her guest drive off, but ran upstairs immediately. Without ringing for her maid, she got her hat and jacket out and put them on herself. One of the spare bedrooms near her own had been converted into a nursery for her son, and now she paused a moment to look in. Smarting from the ill-natured remarks but just endured, the sight of Neddy soothed his mother. He was asleep, and leaning on the cot; the latter watched him breathing.

This silent interview with her child gave Sylvia courage, as it often did, and calmed her feelings of resentment. Out of doors and in the garden, she had soon forgotten her annoyance. Skirting the shrubberies in the grounds, the young woman reached the gate which led into the open park. There she stayed a little while, listening for the sound of the guns to direct her footsteps. Fir and pine plantations in the distance, regular and black, marked the limits of the demesne. Behind these on one side, Sylvia remembered, ran the railway line, and somewhere near stood Hinton station; the very walk

that Ned and she had taken the eventful day of their arrival in uncertainty and doubt.

A shot from this direction now decided her, and, passing through the gate, Sylvia set out to cross the park. A slight mist was hanging on the ground, and made the grass damp to the foot. Hurrying on, the trees around, their leaders pricking the blue sky, appeared to her like vast battalions paraded at each hand. The temptation to return was great, and she halted, uncertain whether to proceed. But that strange feeling of anxiety which had haunted her all day still urged her forward.

At length Sylvia reached the belt of firs which she had noted from the gate, and which formed the boundary of the park. Through this a short path brought her out upon the line beyond. Here, facing her, and separated only by the embankments of the railroad, lay a small wood, or spinney. From this cover she now heard several shots proceed in quick succession. The station-master, passing on his way to meet the London train, accosted the young mistress of Norbury.

"Squire and another gentleman," he said, "are over there, ma'am," pointing to the little wood.

Sylvia thanked him, and, crossing the line, climbed up the bank the other side. That point of vantage gained enabled her to see all that now passed beneath. Close by the wood, and a little way out in the field beside it, she saw Hewlett standing, placed there, no doubt, in case a pheasant should break that way to seek its home in the plantation at her back. The rustling of the fallen leaves attracted her attention as the dog disturbed them running to and fro among the trees. Simultaneously with these sounds came the tapping of a stick plied by a stop within the covert. Then, all at once, the curate turned his head and saw Sylvia watching there above him. Waving his hand in recognition, Hewlett edged his way toward her. This movement brought him close up to the hedge which fenced the wood the same instant that a pheasant rose right in the air above his head. A report rang out in Sylvia's ears, and drew her eyes down from the bird now flying off untouched. In the shortest space of time in which to see and to know it was so, Hewlett's figure swayed. His gun fell to the ground, his body followed in a heap. "Cock over," came a voice from inside the wood.

It was impossible, it could not be. Except that Hewlett had disappeared, there was no change in anything about her. The autumn sky above, some noisy children playing in a neighboring field, the soft collision of two cattle trucks upon the line—Sylvia noted all these things. With a hand pressed to her heart, as though to keep it still and check its beating, she scrambled down the bank. Panting from her haste, she came within a few yards of the body. Then the quickset hedge beside her parted, and Edward Dane stepped out and faced his wife.

CHAPTER VII.

It was to be a quiet day for them, so Dane had said. They would just potter round a neighboring farm or two, and get what sport they could. Accordingly, both men took out their guns and made their way across the park to where an under-keeper and a boy awaited them. The fog had lifted by this time, and every feature of the landscape lay distinct around them in the sun. An impulse prompted each to turn and look at Norbury before the trees quite hid the building from their sight. Strictly speaking, the Italian architecture of the house did not accord with its surroundings. But the vivid greens of spring and early summer had been effaced or mellowed. Brown and yellow leaves replaced the former crude effects, and softened many a point of contrast.

Dane did not, as a rule, much care for views, and, though proud of his home, the interest he felt in it was purely personal. But now, instead of passing on as usual, he lingered as if

unwilling to proceed. Hewlett thought this admiration very natural in a new proprietor, and sympathized with his companion's feelings.

"How well it looks from here?" he said.

So Dane was thinking, and the idea struck him as a novel one. Why should the sight of his own house affect him now, and root him to the spot? The place was well enough, no doubt, but still he saw it every day, and hitherto had never given it a second thought.

"Yes," he replied.

In the distance they could see the pheasants running as the birds sought shelter in the spinneys close at hand.

"You must come later," said Dane, "and have a crack at those."

By two o'clock, content with five brace of pheasants for their morning's work, they left off a while to rest. A few hundred yards away, and conspicuous by reason of the great elm in front of it, stood the village inn. Dane pointed out the place to his companion.

"You see that public?" he explained. "It is 'The Fox,' where all the poachers of the neighborhood collect for miles around."

Hewlett glanced at it indifferently. Neither

a publican nor a game preserver, the subject did not interest him.

Round and below the hillside where they lay, and with the inn as foreground, stretched the countryside — a peaceful scene of wood and field, displayed, like some huge panorama, for their benefit. A wagoner had pulled up on the dusty road beneath to ease his team, and they could hear the harness rattle as the horses shook themselves. Overhead, a rook flapped, cawing lazily. Certainly it was a day of days, and had its effect on both. Dane was the first to break the silence.

"Hewlett," he said, "you have no notion how odd it seems to be a married man." Then added: "My wife has shown the youngster—you have seen my boy?"

"Yes," replied the other; "Mrs. Dane brought him down last night, before we dressed for dinner."

"A jolly little chap," continued Dane, a note of interrogation in his voice. "Do you know," he said, shamefacedly, "I am very fond of him, and that."

"Of course you are," replied Hewlett, promptly.

"Well," said the other, jumping up, "we may as well be moving on. Sorry to have bored you about Ned, but you must excuse a father."

The curate protested that the subject interested him, but all the while he looked at Dane inquiringly. The latter's manner the whole morning, and now this sudden mention of his son, was so unlike him.

As before, they took it easily, making slow additions to the bag. In this way, as the afternoon wore on, they reached the neighborhood of Hinton station. Not far from the line, and almost touching it, lay a small covert which the party now approached. This wood young Dane suggested they should shoot as a good finish to the day.

"We will just run through it," he explained. "The house is close, and we can cut across the park home when we have done. Hewlett," he added, "wait in the field up on the station side, and Stone and I will beat the wood to you. Only don't leave the place or move about, but stand still."

The curate nodded and walked off as directed, while his host watched him take up the position indicated. Then, telling Stone, the keeper, to

let loose the dog, Dane and the men got in the wood. Brushing through the undergrowth, for the place was blind and thick with leaves, Dane pushed his way along. Alert and ready, he followed the movements of the retriever as it hunted to and fro in front. At length he came within a few yards of the hedge, which lay between him and the field where Hewlett stood. The noise of something running in the ditch beside caught his ear, and the dog dashed forward, giving tongue. There was a short chase, a flutter, and then with final whirr of wings a pheasant rose before him. Judging Hewlett to be some distance off, Dane fired just as the bird had topped the fence. A queer sound reached the latter, but in the excitement of the moment passed unnoticed, drowned in the scuffling of feet and the short, sharp barks the dog was giving. Getting into the ditch and crawling out the other side, Dane saw the pheasant he had shot at distant in the air, like a small, black dragon-fly. His gaze falling, to his surprise he found Sylvia standing there, and staring at him with round, frightened eyes. Also, his foot touched something soft upon the ground, and, looking down, the whole truth flashed upon him. Hew-

lett had been the other side the hedge, and had received part of the charge intended for the bird. One glance at the body prone before him was sufficient, but sick and faint, Dane stooped a moment to examine it. Then, as he stood irresolute, a word cut through the air and struck him like a blow.

"Murderer!"

It was his wife who had said this. With drawn face, and eyes in which dislike and loathing mingled, she confronted her husband. Moistening his lips, Dane tried to utter a few words of explanation, but Sylvia was already on her knees beside the body, unconscious of the other's presence. Something she saw there, and the dead man's condition, made her scream.

Meanwhile the keeper had come up, and stood close by with mouth agape and vacant wonder on his face. His master turned to him.

"Run, Stone, to Dr. Rice at once!" he said. "Look sharp about it, man!"

Twice he had to repeat the words before the other seemed to understand. Dane knew it was too late, but something must be done.

"Oh, go, go—for mercy's sake be quick and go!" cried Sylvia.

The man moved off reluctantly, the while he eyed his master in suspicious fashion. At the same time Dane heard a whisper :

"Dead, dead !"

Glancing once more at the dead man's body, a shudder passed over him like a touch of ague. Bending over his wife, he placed a hand upon her shoulder. Sylvia shrank away.

"Murderer !" she said.

This time he could not swallow down the word. No kindly fancy could again suggest a doubt of its intention. In his distress, Dane broke out in short, halting sentences.

"Sylvia, it was an accident, a mistake ! God knows it was. Don't you believe me ? Won't you speak to me ?"

Only a boy, he longed for one word of sympathy to restore his sanity and brace him to the shock. Again he approached Sylvia for a last appeal, but her expression held him still. Could that indeed be hers, that face so white and with the corners of the mouth drawn down ? There was that in it, as she looked at him, which of a sudden made him old. No need for him to mix with men, or travel more to gain experience of life. His youth had withered.

In the silence of the minutes that now passed, Dane must have moved away; for presently he found himself out in the middle of the field, stumbling across toward the railway gate. There he paused a second to look back mechanically; Sylvia's position had not changed, and she was kneeling there beside the dead man's body. A twitch came at his elbow, and the sound of some one sobbing recalled him to the present. The boy who had been beating for them stood trying to attract attention. The urchin's eyes were full of tears he wiped away alternately with the knuckles of each hand.

"Please, sir, may I go home?"

With an oath, Dane swung through the gate on to the line, down which he walked in the direction of the station.

Half-witted, he tried to pull himself together and review the situation. What had he done? Would they bring him in a murderer, or merely call it manslaughter? No one would believe it was an accident. How could they, with the story told? Stunned as he was, a vision of himself within the dock arose, and with it the accusing finger of his wife directed at him. Stone, even that lout, suspected him, and had heard

him called a murderer. But Sylvia, his wife, what of her, the woman whom he loved, and who had turned against him and believed him to be guilty? In any case he could be with her no more; he could not live at Norbury again, a by-word and distrusted, an object of suspicion to the neighborhood, and hated by his very wife. If his life in future was to be a hell, it should at least be one of his own choosing. Why not go and make an end of it at once? Yes! Better to go—now!

The vague purpose fell in well with his condition. Quickening his steps to put it into practice, another thought, like an intruder on infirmity, arrested him. He stopped.

Why had his wife shown such excessive grief about the man? Did she love him? Easily and without an effort many things occurred to him. A dozen circumstances pieced themselves together in his mind. He cursed them both, the man and woman, the living and the dead.

Then it was a voice insistent and new to him began to speak. Importunate and strange, it kept on whispering in his ear. The moment was opportune, it urged; why not return and make a job of it? Let him go back and kill the woman

whom he loved, and leave her with her dead. That would be revenge, and did he know how good that was? Revenge so sweet that death itself would follow after—calm as the fall to sleep.

A bell rang out, and the metallic sound awoke attention. A cloud of smoke, becoming larger by degrees, lapped up the line of rail on which he stood. The London express! An impulse carried him along and hurried him on to the platform. The engine passed by with a rattle, and, opening the first carriage door that halted opposite, he stepped in.

A few jolts to start with, and the train moved slowly forward. Slipping his arms through the window slings for steadiness, Dane peered out. At first the hedges glided by but slowly, then quicker and quicker they slipped past as the engine gathered speed. What a time it took to reach the wood! Dane thought, and strained his eyes as the first trees in it now swept by. What years had passed in those few minutes since he was there, walking in that very place, watching the retriever hunting out a rabbit and waiting for the chance to get a shot! What was that he saw before him? The train had drawn

away, and passed the wood, which now receded in full view. There, outside it, on the very spot he had left Sylvia, a group of people were assembled—a tiny patch of figures that Dane saw in his mind's eye as he sank back upon the cushions of the carriage. Soon this blotch increased in size and danced fantastically. A little longer and it crept on all sides of his vision. He saw no more.

* * * * *

A thousand lights were twinkling through the darkness of the carriage window when Dane awoke to consciousness. Underneath him the vibration of the points shot through the flooring at his feet. Then came a sound of pent-up noise, a muffled roar within a huge gray building. The rays of the electric light made white streaks on the blue-cloth fittings of the compartment; and he heard a voice, which asked if he had luggage.

CHAPTER VIII.

"HALT, who goes there?"

"Visiting rounds."

"Pass visiting rounds, and all is well."

Short and sharp the challenge and replies rang out across the barrack square. From inside the guard-room came the sounds of hasty preparation, together with the tramp of feet. The officer of the day was on his rounds, and now stood ready for inspection at the gates. Through the latter a portion of the parade ground could be seen inclosed each side by wooden huts. At Baywater Dock these little cabins served as barracks, and for the present moment were the quarters of the First Battalion of the Fencibles.

Saunders, dressing hurriedly for mess, was startled when he heard the second bugle go. A guest night, he had asked a friend who lived close by to dine with him. Hastily he completed his toilet and went over to the mess and on

into the ante-room. The place was full as it could hold, and everybody seemed engaged in talking or busy with a drink. Among this crowd, split up in mixed groups of soldiers and civilians, Saunders could not see his guest. Relieved to find himself the punctual one, he fell to thinking of the coming winter and its sport. Dane's invitation for a shoot had reached him at a most convenient season, for leave had been granted him at Christmas, the time of year in great request with all his brother officers. Ned, also, he would like to see again, and Sylvia, too, who used to be a jolly girl enough at Churston. Last, but not least, there was Norbury itself, which always held a lot of birds, and Dane, he knew, preserved.

From these reflections Saunders was aroused by the arrival of his friend.

"Sorry to be late," the latter said. "I had a job to get here, as it was."

Saunders laughed, it was so like old Langley to make excuses. At dinner, presently, and as the regimental band struck up in the adjoining room, his friend explained more fully.

"We were over at MacRabbon looking at some horses, and coming back the cart broke down.

Fortunately we found another one of sorts, and borrowed it."

Old Langley, as he spoke, glanced at the room and its appointments with approval. Certainly it was a lively scene, and to a stranger, striking in a novel way: the table down the middle, with its glittering cups and trophies placed at intervals, and round it the blue, red and gold of different corps. For there were other guests besides civilians; gunners from the battery close by, and two men belonging to a gunboat lying near. Yes, thought the old boy, as he took in his surroundings, these soldiers had indeed a pleasant time.

Saunders, sitting there beside him, could have told his friend a different tale, had the moment been suitable for confidence, and the latter disposed to credit it; of governmental tricks, and of the monotony of barrack life. But at present he was thinking what a pleasant change it was to talk to some one from outside, instead of to that old Scotchman opposite, for instance, whose inmost thoughts were so well known by constant repetition.

"See that old chap?" he said to his companion. "He is our paymaster, and a great character.

Wait till the Madeira comes to warm him up a bit, and he will astonish you. Tells the stalest of old chestnuts, and starts them in with, 'Let me tell ye now.' "

Host and guest had many subjects to discuss in which both took an interest. Besides, young Langley was in Canada, and Saunders thought of going there if he should leave the service. Dinner over and the Queen's health drunk, the voices around grew loud and more assured.

Close by, the music still played softly, and Saunders considered how best to amuse his friend.

"Have a game of billiards?" he suggested.

"Presently, if you don't mind," the other said. "It is so pleasant here. By the by," he added, "have you seen the evening paper? It contains a curious thing about a shooting accident. Two fellows, it appears, went out together for a rough day's shooting, just as you and I might do. Reaching a wood, one man is left outside, while the other beats the place out with the keeper. From what I can make out, they put a pheasant up between them, whereupon the fellow in the wood shoots his companion in the field."

"Very sad!" said Saunders, indifferently.

These things were bound to happen, if people were not careful, and this particular case was of no especial interest.

"Ah, but now comes the romance of the affair. No sooner has he shot his friend, than the man finds his own wife waiting for him on the spot."

"Devilish awkward!" observed Saunders, sympathetically.

"Well, what does he do?" went on the speaker. "Sends the keeper off post-haste to get a doctor, and, according to the latter, he left the couple at high words."

Saunders nodded.

"Coming back with the medico, and what assistance he can get, the keeper finds—what do you think? Why, the woman fainting by the dead man's body, and his master nowhere to be seen."

"Bolted?"

"They seem to think so. The house and premises were searched without result. Dane——"

Saunders sat up.

"What name did you say?" he asked, sharply.

"Dane or Dene, or something similar to it. Anyhow, to-morrow's paper will inform us."

"Come into the ante-room," said his host. "It

will be quiet there. These fellows when they leave are sure to have a pool, and we shall be alone."

Installed in a comfortable chair with a big cigar to help him, the narrator continued:

"Sorry I did not bring the 'Globe' with me, as you appear to be so interested," he said. "But I remember the name of the fellow's place quite well--Norbury."

There was no further room for doubt, and Saunders felt distressed.

"What have they done about it?" he asked, at last.

"Well, all this occurred late yesterday, and the news did not reach the morning papers before they went to press. By this time I suppose a warrant has been issued."

A warrant to arrest his old friend and playmate, that could never be, thought Saunders.

The noise and chaff and laughter, together with the click of billiard balls, attracted Langley in this pause of conversation. He fidgeted and looked in the direction whence they came. The monotonous refrain of the marker reached them—"Red on white, player green," persistent as a hawker's cry. Near them the colonel sat with a

few friends, engaged in a quiet rubber. Saunders leant over to his guest.

"The fact is," he said, "I know the man."

"What! The fellow I was speaking of in reference to this case?"

"Yes! Dane and I were at the same tutor's, with a parson called Weatherston."

"I have heard of him."

"Look here, Langley, there must be some mistake about all this. I bet you Dane is innocent as we are."

Then, as the other remained silent, Saunders continued:

"Oh, I know what you think. You consider his disappearance to be suspicious."

"My dear chap, I don't think about it. I can form no judgment. This Dane is a friend of yours, you say, and no doubt he will turn up all right."

Saunders understood, and gathered what the general verdict passed on Ned would be.

"I wonder how his wife will take it," he said. "I was going there to shoot next month."

Langley nodded.

"Bore for you," he said. "Who was this man he shot? A parson, so the paper puts it."

Hewlett's name occurred to Saunders, but he dismissed it as unlikely. The curate, he remembered, was in London, and this man was probably a neighbor.

"Mrs. Dane seems to have been much troubled."

Something in Langley's tone awakened a suspicion and disturbed the other. Certain events at Churston, hardly worth a notice at the time, came back to his recollection. Sylvia had always sought the curate out, and shown a wish for his society. Suppose the man was Hewlett, after all? Poor Dane—poor chap!—had he, too, been observant and done this thing in a mad fit of jealousy? Still, it was unlike his friend, and Saunders did not think it possible.

"Oh, people lose their heads," he replied, vaguely. "Have a drink?"

They adjourned to the billiard room, which Saunders left immediately his guest had joined a game of pool. Restlessly he walked up and down the mess, now sorry for himself, now worried on his friend's account. Even the colonel noticed him at last, and looked up from his whist.

"Saunders," he said, "the prospect of that leave seems to disturb you. Heaps of time to change your mind."

The chief was right, and it was just as well to sacrifice his holiday, the other thought. He had not the heart to shoot or seek amusement elsewhere at the moment. Ned, his old companion, where had he gone, and what had happened to him? Perhaps when Dane reached his destination, wherever that might be, he would think of him and write.

Next day when they received the morning papers all doubts that Saunders had were set at rest. Under the heading, "Shooting Affray," the whole unfortunate business was detailed at length. It was a relief to find, since Dane had chosen flight, that no one had a clue to follow. This was the sole satisfaction Saunders got from the perusal, for the dead man proving to be Hewlett made the matter worse in his opinion. Of one thing only he was thoroughly convinced, Dane had not committed an intentional murder.

But time wore on and brought no further news of the fugitive. Tired of speculating on the matter day by day, Saunders by degrees forgot. When occasionally the memory of his friend occurred to him, he told himself that the affair would have an explanation later and the whole thing prove a mere mistake.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME towns, like individuals, retain their nationality no matter the number of years that have passed with the stranger. Nice, for instance, cannot disguise her birthmark or simulate a first appearance even of French blood. An Italian girl she will remain, who poses sometimes as a Parisienne for her own convenience.

It was here, one bright and sunny day, upon the promenade, that Sylvia Dane encountered Saunders. They had not met again on leaving Churston, and now a year had passed since the catastrophe at Norbury. But pale and ill as she was looking, the young soldier recognized her easily. Their greeting was cordial, with the same thought uppermost in both their minds, the very sight of one suggesting questions that the other did not care to put.

To shun, if possible, consideration of the past, and all reflection on its time of horror, Sylvia had left home. Among fresh scenes and unfam-

iliar faces, with her child as a companion, she endeavored to ignore her ghost and to finally forget. This Saunders partly guessed, as he explained to her the reason of his presence. Monte Carlo and the tables had attracted him, and he was staying there a few days for a gamble. As her friend walked by her side, Sylvia remembered the invitation given him to shoot at Norbury. She colored at the recollection which embarrassed her.

"Papa told me," she said, "you were a soldier. What an honor for Churston?"

"All very well, Mrs. Dane," he replied, "but I get sick enough of it sometimes. Often I wish myself back at your father's."

So did she—where there were only girlish fancies to contend with, and no skeleton to rattle; no phantom which dispensed with bells to summon it, and whose whispers caused her fear.

"What, tired so soon of your profession?" she replied. "Still, the fetters don't seem very galling. Monte Carlo surely is some compensation for your duties to a grateful country!"

"Never you mind. If you saw us every day you would admit that I deserved this trip. Nothing to do, no racing within reach, or any

other fun. Just think," he added, "the governor wired for me not long ago from Newmarket, and the C. O. would not give me leave. Said I had too much already."

Try as she would to appear sympathetic, Sylvia could not help smiling. Saunders noticed it.

"Excuse me," he said, contritely, "talking of myself and my affairs like this. Tell me, Mrs. Dane, can I do anything for you?"

"You are very kind," she replied, and shook her head.

Her companion was silent. Had he, as in the fairy tale, to name a wish to have it gratified, there would have been no hesitation on his part. He would have asked this girl, for really she was little more, if she believed her husband to be guilty. That a warrant had been issued for the latter's apprehension, Saunders was aware. The evidence against Dane at the inquest had been telling; chiefly on account of the keeper's evidence and his own wife's exclamations. Sylvia, indeed, had afterward denied all knowledge of her husband's actions; but this had been attributed to her desire to shield the culprit. Dane's flight, too, had aggravated matters in the eyes of every one, and turned the scale against him.

But this girl, what did she herself think, and did she share this general opinion?

"I can guess your thoughts," said Sylvia, suddenly. "It is a subject seldom forgotten, even in my sleep, from which it wakens me."

Saunders began an excuse.

"How do you like this place," she continued, to change the conversation, "which I find so pretty and so quiet? Most of the flower girls know me by sight, and the beggars, too, I fear. In the mornings, when I drive to Beaulieu or elsewhere in the neighborhood, it seems the very spot for me."

He listened to her, although the tone in which she spoke made him uncomfortable. It was so changed from what it used to be, and very different from the cheery voices of his friends.

"And you?" asked Sylvia. "Suppose you left the army, what would you do? Myself, I never wished to be a man so much as I do now. Oh, that I could throw my energies on some one thing, no matter what, and make an occupation for my thoughts!"

And as she said these words it seemed to him that this desire had laid her sorrow bare. Nor did it need the sudden appearance of Jennie

Adams on the scene, or the first words she uttered, to strengthen this opinion.

"Poor lady!" whispered the nurse.

In attendance on her mistress, she had seen the meeting, and had observed them as they talked. Now, warned by a look on Sylvia's face, she intervened to take the latter's arm. As she did so, Jennie turned and said to Saunders, quickly:

"Say good-by, and leave us."

This the young man did, a good deal bewildered by her manner. He looked at Sylvia before going, and saw that she was agitated. There was nothing for it but to do as Jennie bid him, and then return to Monte Carlo. So, bowing hurriedly, Saunders took his leave of them and sauntered to the station. Mentally he made a comparison between the Sylvia he had left and the bright and pretty girl of Churston Rectory. What wreck and havoc of two lives a moment's carelessness—for carelessness he still considered it—had caused.

But no sooner were they in her suite of rooms, which overlooked the street and little public garden, than Sylvia asked the nurse why she had interfered. Jennie affected not to hear, but

to be occupied with the arrangement of some flowers upon the table. Her mistress persisted.

"Why did you send Mr. Saunders away?" she inquired, and then added, petulantly: "I have no one here to talk to."

"He thought you might be tired, ma'am," the nurse replied. "But he will call to see you in a day or two."

"Confess the truth now, Jennie. You were afraid to let me talk to him for fear he mentioned certain things. Make yourself easy, for what does it signify to me one more or less of the old lot? A minute or so with them, what does it matter, when others stay the night and day?"

The old woman, with her spirit humbled by the turn events had taken, did not answer. Was it not due to her advice and owing to her own interference that her mistress suffered? The being she loved most on earth, whom she had nursed in infancy and tended during youth, was now in sorrow through her action.

"Perhaps, after all, you were right," continued Sylvia, "to send Mr. Saunders away. Society would do me good, I feel, but not his, which reminds me of so much. If only I could

meet some charitable person, ready to ignore the past in conversation. That should not be difficult. There are a good many people here," she added, "and more are coming soon. I must cultivate a few of them, and try to make new friends."

"No doubt that would be best," agreed Jennie Adams. But still her mistress need not be despondent, for there was Master Edward. At this name Sylvia's face softened, and she glanced at the neighboring door. Then she sighed.

"You mean well, nurse," she said; "but dreadful as it sounds, even his presence is at times distasteful." Then, seeing the surprise upon the other's face, she continued: "My son is everything to me, and all I have to love now in the world, but yet I cannot help it if he, too, recalls the past. That very day, before I started, I ran upstairs to look at him."

Jennie was uneasy. Well she remembered a time in Sylvia's illness when the latter had refused to see her boy.

"I said good-by," she went on, "and walked across the park. How damp it was, nurse, you cannot imagine, and my boots were quite wet through. Standing on the bank afterward, I

felt shivery all over. And I waited and waited, watching John, whom I saw distinctly as I now see you."

The nurse was leaning on the table, a great bitterness in her expression.

"And then all at once a gun went off, and presently I was on my knees beside his poor, dead body. And his head, it was dreadful! Suddenly I felt a touch, it would keep coming on my shoulder, and then I saw, you know whom — I was mad. I forget what I said, but soon he went away and left me. I did not see him any more. Then quite a crowd of people came all round me, and I remember nothing further."

Her listener could have made good the deficiency of memory—of how Sylvia lay insensible when found beside the dead man, and of her subsequent delirium. It was, however, no part of the nurse's duty to dwell on such a dangerous topic.

"Now, ma'am," she said at length, "let the past bury the past, and listen to me. What you were saying a while back has reason in it. A young lady like yourself has no call to sit here moping. See as many folks as possible, my dear."

There was a pause.

"Very well, nurse," Sylvia said, "crying does no good, and I will follow your advice. But I brought no letters of introduction to the residents, and it is too early yet for visitors. Shall I put up a placard, 'A distressed damsel wishes to make friends with those who can amuse her and distract her thoughts'?"

Jennie smiled. The sudden change from grief to gayety was like her mistress, and the sadness had been too much in the ascendant.

"No, ma'am; that would never do. Shall I bring the paper with the list of visitors?"

"I have seen it," said Sylvia.

It was unfortunate, the nurse thought, to miss this opportunity with her mistress in her present mood. The doctor had as much as said society would be beneficial as his medicine.

"It is no good, Jennie; we must reconcile ourselves to the inevitable, and be content with our own company. I used to sketch at home, and I will take it up again."

There was a knock at the door, and in reply to Sylvia's answer, a waiter entered and handed her a card upon a tray. Taking it up, she read the name and turned laughingly to her companion.

"The good Samaritan!" she said. "My wish is gratified. This is M. de Préville, whom I met in Paris."

The nurse looked doubtful, and, sinking her voice on account of the man standing by, she whispered:

"A foreigner, ma'am?"

Her mistress was amused.

"Why, Jennie," she exclaimed, "you look frightened. This gentleman won't eat you!"

The old woman shook her head. Still she could not well object in contradiction to her late advice. So she maintained a stolid silence, which the other might interpret as she pleased. Nor did Sylvia hesitate to do so.

"I will receive monsieur," she said.

The waiter bowed and left the room. The man gone, Jennie prepared to follow his example, when her mistress stopped her.

"Wait," she said, "until he is in the room, and then leave us."

CHAPTER X.

ONCE more the door was opened by the waiter to announce a short, dark man with waxed mustache, who followed close behind. Hat in hand, M. de Préville advanced quietly and bowed to Sylvia.

"Madame, I am fortunate indeed!"

His quick glance had taken in the room and both its occupants. He looked inquiringly at Jennie Adams, as if to know what she was doing there. With a flutter like a hen disturbed, the nurse moved rapidly toward the door and disappeared. Sylvia addressed her visitor.

"How do you do, M. de Préville? Your presence here to-day," she continued, as they were seated, "reminds me of a very pleasant time in Paris."

He bowed.

"Ah, madame, if only you could have stayed with us a little longer! You will remember," he went on, "when we parted at the Gare du

Nord, I said that it was *au revoir* and nothing more?"

To these and other pretty speeches, Sylvia listened and replied in a corresponding strain. Indeed, his appearance on the scene just now was very fortunate, she thought. After the dull but well meaning conversation of the others, his society would be a relief. Meanwhile, she wondered if he still admired her looks, or if he thought her changed.

"But how will you amuse yourself?" asked Sylvia. "There is absolutely no one in the place, and as for this hotel, I am almost the only visitor, at present."

Unabashed at this prospect, M. de Préville explained:

"My physician," he said gravely, "is a tyrant, and alas! madame, a tyrant who must be obeyed. On his recommendation I came here reluctantly enough. Judge, then, of my delight when I saw your name inscribed upon the book downstairs."

Sylvia was uncertain whether to believe this explanation, but in any case it was a compliment to her. Evidently he admired her still, and did not think that she had lost her looks.

"You have just come from Paris?" she asked,

"This moment."

Sylvia hesitated. Anxious to hear from his own lips if the other noticed any alteration in her, she thought it best to hint at trouble as a reason for any change in her appearance. Casting down her eyes, but watching him, she said:

"My life has been a hard one since we met. You may have heard, perhaps?"

M. de Préville made a deprecatory movement.

"In Paris," he said, "one hears everything, but few have time to listen. You say you have had trouble, and I regret it; but trouble lines the face, madame, and you are young as ever."

That was all right, then. An instinct had told her so, or else why should the man have sought her out and now stay talking?

"So we are both invalids, you see," said Sylvia.

"Say, rather, convalescents, and therefore permitted to enjoy ourselves a little. Forgive me, but this life of incarceration—shall I call it?—cannot be good for you. Is it right, madame, that a charming person like yourself should continue this existence of the convent?"

Jennie's very words, but differently expressed.

"Some friends of mine," continued M. de

Préville, "arrive soon. Permit them to call, and meanwhile, allow me to relieve the monotony, if possible?"

He was very good, and Sylvia, after her recent seclusion, became more communicative than was her wont.

"M. de Préville," she said, "your visit is most fortunate, as I must confess to feeling rather lonely. This solitary life affects the nerves."

"Well," he replied, "we will change all that. The resources of the place are not great, it is true, but we will make the most of them. To-morrow, for instance, let us make an expedition to Monte Carlo. They have a company from the Opera Comique there, who might amuse you. Then a game at trente et quarante, or roulette, and a little dinner afterwards."

This was better, Sylvia thought, but could she be seen about with him alone? Nonsense! She was a married woman, and having experienced the disagreeables of that condition, she would snatch the compensations. So she consented.

"Madame," he said, and rose to go, "believe me, you will feel the benefit."

No sooner had the door closed after him than M. de Préville placed his hat in jaunty fashion

on his head, and his face relaxed. A satisfied smile replaced the tension of respectful sympathy with Sylvia. Had his dignity permitted he would have danced along the passage there and then. Was there ever such good fortune? Decidedly the good doctor had been right to send him to this place.

De Préville took in the situation at a glance. The woman was hipped and bored with nothing but the past misfortunes of her married life to dwell on. Sapristi! how well he remembered her in Paris—her face and figure, and above all that hair, whose color changed so rapidly from red to gold. Her husband, a dull and stupid creature, was quite unworthy of her. Happily there was no occasion to consider him in future. For once he had shown a certain tact and given way to better men. So delighted was de Préville at the unexpected fortune of the meeting, that he quite forgot the club and baccarat. To pass the time he took the train to Monte Carlo, and there ordered dinner for next day. Strolling afterward into the rooms of the Casino, he met Saunders. The two men were strangers, but the soldier had not escaped the sharp eyes of the other. De Préville had ob-

served him taking leave of Sylvia, and felt curious accordingly.

The big entrance hall is cosmopolitan in character, nor are men punctilious in the intervals of gambling. A well-worn means of introduction was sufficient, and de Préville begged a light for his cigar from Saunders. This done, the latter was about to move away, when the other stopped him:

"I saw monsieur at Nice this afternoon," he said, "talking to a friend of mine."

Saunders looked the speaker over in a vain attempt to place him.

"Were you?" he said, awkwardly, "and who was that?"

"Mrs. Dane."

Sylvia! Was this man a friend of hers? And Saunders made a mental note to ask her.

"I met Mrs. Dane in Paris," continued de Préville, "with her husband."

Saunders nodded.

"I suppose you know all about it, then?" he said.

"I was much grieved," said the other. "M. Dane seemed to me a fine open-hearted fellow."

"He was all that," said Saunders, eagerly. "I say, you don't believe he did it?"

De Préville shrugged his shoulders.

"You are his friend, and so am I. How can we tell? Let us go and watch the game."

To him, indeed, the whole affair was ordinary enough, and a very common case of jealousy. This husband had found reason to suspect the English abbé, and so had killed him.

But if de Préville was well satisfied, Sylvia was also pleased with the visit he had paid her. Calling Jennie, after his departure, she astonished the old woman by her cheeriness and change of manner. Dimly conscious that the foreigner, as she called him, was responsible for these high spirits, the nurse would have liked to put some questions.

"Jennie, I am so excited!" said her young mistress. "M. de Préville is quite charming. Tomorrow we are going over, he and I, to Monte Carlo to enjoy ourselves. Come and help me choose a frock for the occasion."

The nurse complied in silence, for she did not quite approve. Mr. Saunders was the better companion of the two, she thought. Like all

people who have led a quiet existence, Jennie believed in those she knew at home.

Punctually next day M. de Préville arrived in a victoria and pair. A few hours passed in the anticipation of a change and some amusement had done wonders for Sylvia. Looking at her with admiration, the other felt his judgment flattered by the improvement.

"You have brought your own Queen's weather," he said, enthusiastically. "We shall have a charming drive."

He was right, for as her mistress waved good-bye to Jennie, the sun shone brightly on the palm-trees in the courtyard. Presently they were on the hard, white road beyond, listening to the rattle of the horses' hoofs. The miles which followed by the sea passed all too quickly for Sylvia, well as she knew the way. Descending through the Condamine, the Casino and its buildings rose in front of them; then up the hill and they had reached the little Bijou Theatre by the Rooms.

"Therese is very good," de Préville found time to whisper as they entered. "She will entertain you."

But once inside, the novelty of her surround-

ings kept Sylvia's attention from the stage. Except that trip to Paris with her husband, she had seen very little all her life. That feeling of exclusion from the gaieties around her, and a resentment of her quiet existence, returned again. Was she never to enjoy herself, and be as other people were? Eagerly she scanned the audience to see what those looked like who lived a life of pleasure. Her scrutiny, so innocent in its intention, over, Sylvia sighed.

The evening passed as gayly as the afternoon. For dinner in the restaurant of the hotel they had secured a table in the corner. Flushed with the heat, and in the excitement of her winnings, Sylvia could not eat. The men and women in small parties round them were of more interest to her than food.

She now observed and recognized the people that she had noticed at the tables, and questioned her companion about them. His answers, guarded as they were, surprised and sometimes startled her. Sylvia thought that she was seeing life at last, and so far found it very pleasant. De Préville, too, amused her with his solicitude about the dinner, and the importance he attached to it. Their meal was half way

through, when she caught sight of Saunders in the distance at the doorway. She beckoned, and as the latter came up, introduced him to her host.

"You did not expect to see an invalid so gay," she said. "Blame M. de Préville, and not me. He takes the whole responsibility."

She meant no harm, but the other's eyes glistened as he bowed to Saunders.

"Will not monsieur join us?" he asked.

Saunders thanked him and declined. Then, addressing Sylvia, he said:

"The fact is, Mrs. Dane, Monte Carlo sees the last of me to-morrow. My leave is up."

Most heartily did M. de Préville congratulate himself on this announcement. So this man, with his airs of one of the family, was going. He felt quite cordially disposed to Saunders, whom he invited to drink coffee with them later.

"Madame will pardon my presumption," he added, "but I see that monsieur is a friend of hers."

Presently they had an opportunity for private conversation, when de Préville left in search of the victoria.

"Mrs. Dane," began Saunders, "why did you

not tell me yesterday, and we could have dined together?"

"I was not feeling well," she said, evasively.

It was impossible to tell him the truth, and that the last few hours had been the happiest she had known some time.

"I am sorry you are leaving," she continued. "We shall meet in London, I hope."

"Sure to," replied Saunders.

His curiosity of the day before returned a moment, and he longed to put a question about Dane. But he could not ask this smiling, well-dressed woman of her husband now. After all, he was not in love with her himself, and if she chose to go about with de Préville, it was no concern of his. Besides, she always was a clever girl, and well able to take care of number one.

So when, on his return, de Préville announced that the victoria was waiting, Sylvia was relieved. Still, as they drove away, she turned and waved to Saunders standing in the lighted hall of the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

AWAKE next morning, Sylvia found her son by the bedside. To pass this hour in the society of the child had grown to be a habit, and one which seemed to her a good commencement for each day. Now, with the recollection of the previous evening dawning in her mind, his presence made her restless and impatient. So, after talking for a little, she called Annette and bade the girl take him away. Her eyes then fell on Jennie standing by with outspread hands, in which were notes and gold. The nurse had just brought in this money she had found, and looked both doubtful and astonished.

"My winnings," said Sylvia.

"I found this money," replied the other, ignoring the expression "winnings," "in your dress, ma'am, as I was brushing it."

The latent Puritan in Jennie Adams rose at sight of so much wealth, acquired in such a manner.

"I remember," said her mistress. "Put it down there, please. I must find some charity to give it to."

The nurse emptied the money upon the dressing-table, as desired. In doing so the blue billets and the golden louis were too much for her, and awakened curiosity. Forgetful of her rôle of protest, she exclaimed involuntarily:

"How did you make all this?"

"I cannot say," said Sylvia, listlessly. "It seemed easy enough to win. M. de Préville, I recollect, would not interfere, in case he spoilt my luck."

At this name Jennie relapsed into her old suspicious manner.

"If he had anything to do with that," pointing to the money lying near, "the sooner you get rid of it the better, ma'am!"

Sylvia looked at her old friend curiously.

"You appear to dislike him very much," she said. "Why?"

"I do," replied the nurse. "I cannot explain it any more than Dr. Fell, but I do, and that's flat!"

Her mistress smiled. Yet she had a great opinion of the other's shrewdness, and so began

apprising M. de Préville with more attention in her mind. Glad as she had been to find a bright companion, the man himself escaped that notice she might otherwise have given him. So far as loving de Préville was concerned, she never thought of such a thing. He was simply more entertaining and amusing than the majority of men and women who had crossed her path. Deep down in her heart lay a memory she might ignore from time to time, but could never quite forget.

"Mr. Saunders is leaving, Jennie," she said. "He told me so last night."

"Going," repeated the other.

The nurse was much disturbed at this announcement. To her there was a kind of moral support in the presence of Saunders she could not explain, but which she felt instinctively. A young gentleman brought up like him, she thought, must sympathize with her, and share her views about the foreigner.

Meanwhile, she assisted Sylvia to dress in silence, uncertain how to wean her mistress from this new infatuation. Later, she was not surprised, but much annoyed, when M. de Préville called. The latter was in the best of spirits, and

congratulated Sylvia on her luck the night before.

"But, alas!" he said, "it does not always last, so make the most of it."

"Fortune has been kind this time," replied Sylvia, "but I shall not play again."

He looked at her quickly.

What an odd creature she was, so changeable and yet fascinating! Yesterday she had played with almost feverish eagerness, and now she wished to give it up! Well, women were uncertain in their moods, and in a pretty one these changes were attractive.

"They tire you, no doubt," he said, "these tables with their noise and heat. Have patience, for the place will soon be gay."

"If I am here," said Sylvia.

Her visitor was genuinely alarmed.

"But, madame——" he stammered.

"My home is in England," she said.

"Bah! I know those homes, those gloomy chateaux," he exclaimed. "As well take the veil and live in a convent!"

Exactly her opinion, Sylvia thought, but she did not say so.

"There is my son," she said.

Her son. To be sure, she had a child, and the recollection did not please him. He was afraid this infant by some chance might interfere between them.

"Ned is so young," continued the mother. "I have made no plans for him. There is plenty of time."

He had not come to talk about her child, and de Prévile checked his impatience.

"About yourself, madame. You cannot continue in this manner, living all alone. Other women have found the means to free themselves, and so must you."

"Not situated as I am, M. de Prévile. For me there is no hope of freedom, as I am not a widow, even. Memory is my one companion, which spoils new scenes and hopes."

These weary reminiscences again. But she was very pretty, and he must do his best to sympathize.


"Do not say that," he said. "At madame's age hope has no limit. This memory that you speak of, I admit that he is troublesome, but change, amusement and love will bring him to his knees."

Sylvia noticed the word love slipped in so

deftly with the other's sympathy. But his admiration flattered her, and his society cheered her loneliness, so she determined to ignore it.

A week and more passed pleasantly enough, and Sylvia found de Préville all attention. He made a point, in fact, of humoring her in every wish. In the mornings he would bring choice flowers to the hotel, and leave the bouquets with a suggestion for the day's amusement. Even down to little things his memory served him, such as buying sweetmeats, which he had noticed Sylvia liked. Not one means did he neglect to render himself indispensable. Experience told him once that stage attained, no woman could restrain a warmer feeling.

Such was the state of affairs when Sylvia encountered fresh annoyance from an unexpected quarter. Jennie declined to stay with her young mistress any longer, and asked to be sent home. In vain she argued with and almost begged the nurse to change her mind and not to leave. The old woman was obdurate, and would not alter her decision. Pressed by the other for her reasons, she had none to give except that she had never liked M. de Préville. This made Sylvia indignant, and the two women quarrelled ser-



iously for the first time in their lives. Reproaches in bitter terms from her young mistress only made the old nurse sullen, and they decided it was best to part.

In the evening, when the cause of all this disagreement called, he found Sylvia listless and depressed. The sitting-room, so bare and stiff originally, like most hotel apartments, had been improved upon by her. The little knick-knacks that a woman carries everywhere she goes, lay scattered round upon the different tables. De Préville's flowers stood in the place of honor in the centre of the room, and filled it with their fragrance. The shade upon the lamp that Sylvia was reading by fell on her hair, which shone.

De Préville saw she was disturbed, and guessed that something had gone wrong.

"Pardon me," he said, "but you have been annoyed, and it distresses me."

The tears were almost in her eyes as Sylvia answered him:


"It is Jennie Adams, my old nurse; after showing her devotion all these years, she now declares that she must leave me. At home it would not matter half so much, and I could understand it better, but here—very cruel of her, I call it!"

As Sylvia talked, speaking fast in her excitement, de Préville watched her. Surely this was the moment he had waited for so long, and it would be foolish to delay. Here was this woman aggrieved by the desertion of an old dependant and hurt accordingly. What a fitting opportunity in which to declare his passion and to proclaim his own devotion.

"Madame, you pain me," he said, "when you speak of such ingratitude. But one there is who will not desert you, and whose whole life is at your service. Consideration for you in your bereavement alone has kept him silent."

Sylvia looked at the speaker wonderingly.

"You will remember," de Préville continued, "the first time that I saw you, an occasion I shall not forget. Since that moment until we met the other day, you and you alone have been in my thoughts. Then I said to myself, she is happy with her husband, I must think of her no more. Again, when I saw you, I took myself to task, for you were lonely and distressed. I said, I will not speak to her immediately, but have patience. I will wait and show that I respect her sorrow, and then little by little she may learn the extent of my love."



"M. de Préville!"

"Yes, yes, madame, I love you! Consider; I am not made of iron. Not adamant, to be in your society without feeling it from the depths of my heart!"

Sylvia listened. She could not help it. Deserted, as she felt herself to be by her one friend, these words of passion soothed her. For the moment she let herself drift on the tide, so to speak, of this man's devotion and love.

"Sylvia!" he exclaimed, and the Christian name upon his lips thrilled her with a sudden fear. "Sylvia, listen! Not far from us by rail, a few hours' journey at the most, lies my native county of Provence. You, who have travelled by that way, must know its aspect well—that country where the vineyards ripen on the slopes, and where the orange trees grow massed in blossoms on the hill. There, by the side of a miniature lake, is my home. Let us go."

He had risen and was approaching her. Still she did not speak or move, but sat as if spell-bound by his vehemence. Gathering assurance at her silence, de Préville took her hand.

"It is an old house, this of mine," he con-

tinued, "but I could make you happy there. Sometimes, when fate or luck has driven me to seek its solitude, I sit in those great rooms alone. I sit, *mon Dieu!* and think how gay they would be with a young companion. I see once more the candles on the wall alight in clusters, and hear the tapping of a high-heeled shoe upon the floor. Shall we go?"

Morality and after-thoughts lay in abeyance, for his words fell on her ears caressingly. She wished to live a little while with fancy dreams like this to comfort and transport her. But suddenly, as if in answer to the man now speaking, and his quick request, the figure of John Hewlett rose. Bending over, *de Prévile* went on talking, and Sylvia felt his breath disturb her hair.

"You hesitate," he was saying. "Why? Each second passed is so much lost to us."

But John Hewlett she would never see again, for he was dead. The newspapers had said so, and she herself had seen him stretched beneath her feet. Then, too, there was that other one she did not love so much, her husband, who had gone away and left her. Why had they gone? She was alone.



Sylvia rose and stood facing her companion with a scared and rigid face.

"M. de Préville, I am wretched and miserable!"

He could not see the ghosts which threatened her, and so realize her fancies. To him she seemed about to yield, and he became at once insistent.

"Be so no longer," he exclaimed. "Come, and we will start at once."

The man's eyes sparkled with excitement, and eagerly he drew Sylvia toward him. He was about to take her in his arms, when a noise close by deterred him, and made them both turn round. The door of the adjoining room was opened, and Annette, the nurse, came in leading Neddie by the hand. Dramatic as their entrance was at such a moment, the boy had merely come to say good-night before he went to bed. With a look as though she saw an apparition, Sylvia eyed her child.

"Mother!" he cried.

A mist appeared to lift from her horizon, and leave the way distinct. What was this man to her? Without a moment's hesitation, Sylvia turned and held her hand out to de Préville.

"Good-by, M. de Préville."

Stupefied by the abrupt invasion, de Préville stood trying to collect his thoughts. Then, as he realized the full significance of this interruption, the blood grew hot within him. You ingratiate yourself after infinite trouble and pains, and when finally you approach to the definite end of your desire, sapristi! a child appears to take your place without an effort. His rage was so great that it held him immovable, and he dared not trust himself to speak. Sylvia's voice aroused him:

"I will not detain you, monsieur," she said, and bowing, led the others from the room.

She had then left him! Mechanically de Préville stretched his hand out for his hat and gloves upon the table. That done, he turned and shook his cane at the door now closing on the woman who had scorned him. The apartment was just above the rez-de-chausée, and the street in view from where he stood. Wandering angrily from one object to another in the room, his eyes at length fell on the houses opposite. At one of these, a shop, a girl had paused to look in at the window. She was well and quietly dressed, a Parisienne from her well-kept hair down to the



neat boots upon her feet. De Préville's face relaxed, and he began to speculate upon the status of the lady.

Who could she be, he wondered? A *femme du monde*, of course, and yet he did not remember meeting her. Just then she turned and saw him watching her. A pretty face, he thought, and taking out his handkerchief, gave it a gentle flourish. The damsel on the pavement smiled. De Préville placed his hat upon his head, and made the former rattle with his stick, then looked back at the door. Did Sylvia think she was the only woman in the world, by any chance? But there were others, let him tell her, better far in face and figure, and in temper, too! Fingering his mustache and swinging his cane, he laughed as he glanced at her door. Again he looked into the street. The girl was there. M. de Préville left the apartment.

CHAPTER XII.

THE little shingled station stood broiling in the sun, and round it lay small mounds of earth, dun-colored in the glare. It was as if a mighty hand had gathered up the ground and flung it back in heaps. Black in patches where the prairie fires had caught them, these hillocks bristled with the fragments of bare poles, sole remnants of the forest. Each scrap of vegetation languished on the withered land and simmered in the heat. Clouds of dust swept with hot breath across the short, dry grass upon the open spaces, but did not move a ripple on the water of the pools.

Upon a wide board hung at one side of the station black letters spelt: "Gold Creek." This name, which brought to mind prospectors' yarns of treasure-trove, was more suggestive than the place itself. Dead alive as it was, the settlement would have been still more deserted but for the business of the depot where the mail train

stopped each day. Here, to snatch the small excitement of its arrival, a group of loafers had collected on the wooden platform. Outside the station a few rigs and wagons waited, whilst their owners smoked and leant against the walls within the shade.

One o'clock, and the mail was due, but not on time. Eagerly men scanned the track, which struck in a straight line across the flat expanse, to catch a sight of the expected train. At length a cloud of smoke hung in the distance on the rail, and presently the steady throb of the approaching engine reached them coming through the air.

The cars drew up, and one by one their occupants descended, swinging to the ground. A motley crowd they were, whom chance had brought together for a moment in this unpretentious spot. Of these a few compelled to take their exercise in doses, commenced their walk at once, while others not so energetic glanced listlessly about. The negro attendants, cool in their gray uniforms, seemed the most contented, for they had found acquaintances, and had relays of friends to chat with all along the route.

A little way apart two travellers who had just

got out were standing by their luggage. They had not long to wait, before a shambling fellow, whip in hand, and smoking a cigar, approached them.

"Say," he said to them, "are you for Rickett's house?"

"Do you come from him?" inquired one of the two addressed.

"Sure," replied the man.

"It is all right, Saunders;" and the speaker turned to his companion. "Ricketts has sent this chap to meet us, and now we had better get our traps on board."

Saunders nodded, and glanced back at the departing train, and at the hind car as it disappeared from view; then at the scene which stretched around the little station, flat and desolate on every hand. Finally he observed the driver, as he supposed their questioner to be. The latter's face, dirty and unshaven as it was, looked out in a good-humored fashion from beneath a big felt wide-awake.

"That's my team," he said, and pointed to a pair of bays lightly harnessed to a four-wheeled cart.

His pride impressed the other favorably, and

Saunders complimented him in warm terms on their possession. Soon all three were jolting from the station, raising clouds of dust, which lay thick on the road and in the ruts beneath them.

"Capital springs, Langley," said Saunders, presently to his companion. "Our dog-carts could not live a minute in this ground."

The driver smiled.

"I reckon you're from the old country," he said.

The last of the wooden shanties round the station left behind, they now emerged upon the open plain. Monotonous and flat it lay before them, devoid alike of human habitation, or anything on which to stay the eye and let it rest. Far off at the horizon, mountains, lilac in the haze of sun and distance, edged this bare expanse. On these, as they drew closer to them, scattered here and there upon the slopes, the slate-gray workings of the mines grew visible. Close up, these lofty hills loomed over and enveloped them, to recede a moment later on each side a valley, green as an oasis, and which they found beyond. Great and striking was the sudden change from the parched landscape they had left, to this well-

tended land that Nature had endowed so richly. Here, spread in length upon the benches of the river, lay many a fertile ranch. Peaceful and homelike in appearance, they recalled the farms of the old country on a large and bolder scale.

New as all this was to him, Saunders sat and watched with interest. The ponies as they galloped by, the manner they were ridden, and the easy seat of the half-breed attracted him; the very saddles aroused his curiosity. From time to time miners on their way to do assessment work would pass them; each man with a packed animal he drove before him, while riding on a second one himself.

Again the party plunged into a forest scene, where the main track they were following led. Round and about them, so high it strained the eye to reach the leaders in the sun, grew trees of different kinds. Douglas pine and tamarack towered side by side in the full pride of growth; while at their feet the fireweed, springing up, spread its pink carpet on the ground.

"We are nigh the reservation," said their guide.

Bare once more each hill round arose in form and color, like a crouching lioness. Along the

river-bed a few shrubs and undergrowth alone relieved the waste, and lent a touch of verdure to the scene. From near at hand came Indians, chiefly women, driving straggling groups of cattle home, and riding cross-legged with much grace. Very picturesque they were, these half-breed squaws, who wore their hair with plaited tail, like Marguerite in "Faust," or girls fresh home from school.

Cattle-ranching country as it was, some crude attempts the Indians made at agriculture could be seen in ill-kept crops of oats. Close by, upon some rising ground, a man was rounding up his cattle. The clever little pony he bestrode would often stop dead short, and then make darts to right and left, quite independent of its rider. Sometimes one of the beasts would break from his companions, only to be promptly headed back by the knowing animal, until such time as the whole herd moved off, one solid mass, in the required direction.

Suddenly the driver pointed with his whip.

"Yon is the camp," he said.

Through the dust and glare, Saunders at last made out a group of wooden cabins standing on a little eminence in front. This tiny hill stood in

a cup, surrounded as it was by other hills the sides of which were partly cleared of timber. Here, again, the same dull silver of the dumps were dotted all about at intervals; while clouds of smoke rose white in unexpected places from the blackness of the firs. Winding about, now within hail, as it seemed, of their destination, now going in what appeared to be an opposite direction, the party at length reached Revolution.

A growing settlement they found it presently, on driving in and down the one road in the middle. This, the main street of the place, was lined with stores of sorts, and numerous saloons, with gaps of empty lots at every hundred yards. Alighting at the Ricketts House, the one hotel and only building of pretension in the camp, they greeted the proprietor. This latter, a little man all rings and pins, and very affable in manner, gave them the information they required. From him they learned the quickest means to reach the various properties which lay outside the place and in the neighborhood.

"Stay here to-night," he suggested, "and start in the morning right away."

This they did, and strolling in the street with

Langley, Saunders realized how different life, if he came here, would be to his past one in the Fencibles. After leaving Sylvia at Nice, he had taken counsel with his friends, and had now come out to invest his small capital. In spite of all his former grumbling, it had cost him many a pang to send his papers in and leave the regiment. Still, money he must have somehow, and there was no chance of making it while in the service.

Early next day, mounted on their ponies, they took a trail which led them to the summit of the hills round Revolution. Pursuing the strike of the range, they soon overlooked their route of yesterday, and saw it winding in the sunlit plain below. Such was their elevation that the road itself seemed close to them, and in the vast distance to the tawny hills beyond, quite near.

Twisting here and stumbling there, they made their way amongst the trees, on some of which a strip of bark was laid back, peeled for guidance—one of the many means by which the Indians keep the trail in their long journeys through the forest.

Glimpses of quartz attracted them in places from amongst the grass and boulders which lay

by and overspread the path. A little further, and they reached a gulch the sides of which had been completely cleared of trees. Within it, and scattered at its base, a little camp came into view, with shanties and several shingled sheds of larger size around. This was the claim of the "Chorus Girl," and the property which they had come to see.

Down below a miner had observed the party, and now came up the slope to meet them. Half way down the hillside, at the entrance to a cross-cut tunnel, lay a large heap of ore, and by it stood a tram-car. Here Langley and Saunders met the man, who introduced himself as Mr. Grogan, the manager. This tunnel by them led, he then explained, to the main shaft, sunk from the spot they had just left. Nearing the dump, all three stooped down to handle and examine the different fragments of rich quartz which lay about in such profusion. As they were thus occupied, Saunders happened to look up, and saw another man, one of the hands, as he supposed, approaching them. He was about to turn away to resume his examination of the ore, when something in the other's walk attracted his attention. Dropping the sample which he held, he looked

again into the bearded face, and tried to recognize its owner. Convinced by a short scrutiny that his fancy had befooled him, Saunders was about to ask a question of the manager, when a voice stopped him. The words died on his lips at the sound, as he turned on the man once again. With this to guide him, recollection stripped the countenance of hair and such disguise, and brought him face to face with Edward Dane.

CHAPTER XIII.

"WHY have you come here?"

The voice, harsh and suppressed, surprised him. Looking at the man again, Saunders wondered if indeed this was Edward Dane.

Evening had fallen in the hours which had elapsed since their first meeting at the tunnel entrance. By a tacit understanding, both men had postponed all explanation at the time, until alone and face to face they could ask each other questions. From where they stood the little camp lay in full sight, some fifty yards beneath. Lights glimmered in a hut or two, but otherwise there was no sign of life about them, and no sound save the swish of the trees and their branches, as the wind moved the leaves overhead.

"Why have you come here?"

This time it could not be his fancy, and the tone was more insistent.

"Not to follow you," Saunders replied, quickly; "you know me well enough for that."

He paused, as if expecting Dane to speak.

"But, Ned, old chap, I am very pleased to see you, all the same."

Still no answer, and Saunders grew impatient.

"Good God, man!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe you did it."

"Why are you here?" Dane broke in abruptly, and his voice trembled. "Here, where I have lived and forced myself at least to be content?" He glanced down at the camp. "There," he said, "lies my life and the friends I have made, and good pals they have proved themselves. And now"—he turned on Saunders with a sudden passion—"you come and bring back hell to me with every word you speak. Curse you! Why are you here to disturb me? Are you not free, and can you not go where you wish? The world, is it not wide enough and large enough for you? Are there not hundreds of places to visit, but you must run me to earth? No; you come here to remind me by your presence of all that I have struggled to forget. Man, do you know what this means to me, and what you have done? You cannot tell—you cannot tell."

Bewildered and distressed at sight of all this

grief he had awakened so unwittingly, Saunders listened. Unprepared, for he had not considered it before, the other's suffering was a revelation to him. Indignant with those who had thrown doubts on Dane, and innocent as he believed his friend to be, the extent to which the latter felt now first came home to him. If ever the idea that they might meet had crossed his mind, he had not pictured such a scene as this.

Dane, who had been watching him, went on :

"Yes. I thought you did not see it in that light. But now that you are here—worse luck!—what do you mean to do?"

Saunders summoned all the resolution he possessed to keep himself in check, and to restrain his rising anger. The recollection that this man had been his friend, and since had gone through much, alone withheld an outburst. He answered quietly :

"That depends on Langley, my companion of this afternoon. But, Dane, you need not fear my presence in this place, for even if I did secure an interest in the mine, I should not come here to live. Sit down," he added ; "let us talk."

The passion of the moment past, called forth so suddenly in Dane, had spent itself within him,

The first sight of his friend had given rein to thoughts long pent, and now, relieved, he fell into indifference.

"As you like," he said. And for a while the two men smoked their pipes in silence. Occasionally they would look up at each other furtively, for both were anxious to put in a word, and yet were at a loss how to begin. To hear news of his boy, without discussion of his wife, was what Dane would have liked. In the same way Saunders wished, if possible, to take a message home to Sylvia from her husband.

"I have left the service," the latter said, at length, by way of a commencement. "I sent my papers in before I started on this trip."

"Broke?" inquired the other.

"Very near it."

"Well, not to have a cent in your pocket is bad, and no mistake. Still, there are worse things than that."

Saunders nodded. If only Ned would talk he might regain his old friend's confidence.

"You made me angry just now, Tommy," continued Dane, "when we met. All the same, I still wish you to leave. You see my reason, don't you?"

"That is all right."

"I want to forget anything and everything outside, and life here gets a tremendous grip on one somehow. Give me hard work to keep me going, and an off-day on a cattle ranch for a change."

Presently he resumed:

• "At first I used to go down there"—and the speaker pointed toward Revolution—"to drink and gamble. 'Twas no good. A pain in your heart is bad enough, without a head to help it."

There was a pause. This opportunity to talk would not occur again, and Saunders felt that he must make the most of it.

"I suppose," he said, "you have had no news from the other side?"

"From the old country?" Dane replied. "No; nor do I wish to, except"—he turned away from his companion—"for Neddie."

These words conveyed a half request the other caught up eagerly. Here at least was something he could do to help his friend, and give him interest in his life. For this man's sake Saunders determined he would correspond with Sylvia and so procure news indirectly of the child.

"I can manage that," he said quickly, "and will keep you posted in the young 'un and his movements."

They shook hands, and Saunders saw how much the offer had affected Dane.

"Thank you, Tommy."

"And Sylvia?" he pursued.

One glance at his companion's face showed Saunders the mistake of such a question; for at the mention of his wife all tenderness evoked by Neddie's name had left the other's countenance.

"Not a word. Do not speak of that woman."

In his excitement Dane had risen from his place, and now walked up and down before his friend. When next he spoke, it was in those low tones a man may use when thinking to himself in trouble.

"Who sent me away and called me vile names in the time of my misery, when a word from her lips would have given me heart. It stuns a man to get a sudden blow like that, when all the world seems bright around, and turns him sick and giddy. You know what she said?"

Dane stopped and turned sharply on his listener.

"Man," he said, "that is what I have to forget."

Helpless and unable to express the sympathy he felt, Saunders waited.

"She called me a murderer," continued the other; "I, who would have done anything on earth for her."

Again Dane paused, and then assumed a lighter tone.

"Well, after that I did not care a curse what happened. A devil seemed to take me by the arm and press it, whispering things into my ear, that she and Hewlett had been lovers, and that I was the one fool left in ignorance."

He broke off suddenly.

"Excuse me, Tommy, ranting like a tub-thumper! Anyway, you brought it on yourself."

From a little distance down below came the faint twang of a banjo, and, as it ceased, the flutter of applause. Both men looked down upon the camp, from which the music came.

"That is our old negro playing," said Dane. "First-rate he is. Knows all the old Southern songs you don't hear every day."

As though to justify the reputation given him,

the player touched the strings, and presently the first notes reached them. "To the sweet sunny South take me home," they implored in each shake and vibration.

The spell was broken, but the music held them bound in thought. All conversation of the past now ceased between them, nor did they refer to it again.

Before they said good-night, however, the two men talked of many things—mining, ranching and the lumber trade, on all which subjects Dane could give his friend some pointers. The parting, when it came, was in marked contrast to their meeting, and Saunders thought his friend was almost cheerful as he said good-by. Between them it had been arranged that he should leave the camp next day, deputing any settlement of his affairs to Langley. This understanding seemed to be a great relief to Dane, and to ease his mind.

Next morning there was business to attend to, and Langley kept the other hard at work. Saunders had been in hopes that he might see his friend before they started, but though he kept a sharp lookout he saw no sign of Dane. He concluded, therefore, that the latter did not wish

them to be seen together, and that the parting of last night was in very truth good-by.

As they rode up the hillside he turned a moment in his saddle to look back upon the home his friend had chosen. The previous evening with his new-found playmate, appeared a dream in daylight beside the commonplace reality of the surroundings. The voice of Langley finishing some argument aroused attention.

"They might ship some of their high-grade ore to pay expenses," the latter was saying, "but it would be a mistake."

Saunders looked at his companion.

"A moment's mistake," he added, with a glance back at the camp.

On their return to Revolution they found their driver waiting for them with his team. Well had he employed the time they had been absent, by getting both a bath and shave—"feeling fine," as he himself expressed it, and so smart in his appearance Saunders hardly knew him.

CHAPTER XIV.

SYLVIA was sitting in the drawing-room of the Harley Street house, when Lady Rakesmire called. It had not taken long, on her return from Nice, to decide where she would live in future. The idea of Norbury, with its memories and associations, she dismissed at once. The same objection applied to her old home at Churston Rectory, and so she had chosen London. After all, her own house was ready waiting for her there, and it was just as well to make some use of it. Still, the great rooms were depressing, and she welcomed any chance that might bring a visitor. It was a pleasure, therefore, to her when the servant entered to announce her country neighbor.

"My poor child!"

There was a genuine ring of sympathy in Lady Rakesmire's voice as she greeted Sylvia with these words. Something about the room, too, exercised her greatly, and elicited a further exclamation.

"Good heavens!"

Sylvia waited for the other to explain.

"It is worse than I expected—far!"

"What is worse, Lady Rakesmire?"

"My dear, the house and rooms and everything about them. Whatever brought you to this place?"

Putting up her glasses, the old lady surveyed the whole apartment at her leisure, and the investigation seemed to cause her fresh amazement.

"Dear, dear!" she said again.

"You see," Sylvia explained, "neither house nor furniture is my selection"—the face of that old man returned to her, and she shuddered at the thought—"for both were chosen by my father-in-law. What can I do?"

"Do? Why, let it and take a smaller one in Curzon Street. I know the very thing to suit you."

Sylvia looked pleased.

"It is depressing here," she admitted.

"Depressing! Antediluvian, I call it! The merit of antiquity," continued Lady Rakesmire, "has always puzzled me. Living in an old house is like dwelling in a cemetery, to my mind, only that instead of harmless old bones you have un-

canny ghosts. Well, what do you think of my proposal?"

It was a good one, Sylvia thought, and the matter was arranged between them to Lady Rakesmire's satisfaction. An amateur house-agent for her friends, many a professional envied the old lady her connection in the business.

"You must go out," she pursued, addressing Sylvia. "Young and good-looking—oh! yes, you are—and well off into the bargain, to remain boxed up like this is an absurdity."

Under the able auspices of this energetic friend, the change of residence was made in wonderfully short time. Before Sylvia could look around almost, and realize the sudden move, she was installed in Curzon Street. Not only that, but a tenant had been found and her old house occupied, and all this was due to Lady Rakesmire's energy.

"It is well enough for you, my dear," she said to Sylvia, "to take life easily, but when Rakesmire died I had to use my wits and scrape along as best I could. Everything was entailed absolutely, and the jointure I received the merest pittance."

Great commiseration was expressed for Syl-

via Dane upon her entry into society. People thought that the 'red widow,' as they called her, had received harsh treatment at the hands of fate. But the woman herself, deep down in her heart, had many a doubt if she were worthy of this sympathy. Some wondered she did not apply for a divorce, as her position was peculiar. Young and rich, for the moment she was neither wife, nor maid, nor widow.

Meanwhile, Sylvia took advantage to the full of all the pleasures this new life afforded. At her small house in Curzon Street she often entertained the members of her own immediate set. She seemed insatiable, going out to theatres, balls and parties indiscriminately, and to whatever entertainment promised her the most amusement.

In this fashion several years passed by, with the winters in France or Italy, and the seasons spent in London. Saunders she heard from occasionally, and the constant requests which he made for news of her son touched her. Neddie was fast growing up, and already Sylvia had his name put down for entrance to a public school.

Yet, with so many reasons for satisfaction, with money, youth and admiration, the woman

knew her life was not complete. Sylvia Dane, with everything to all appearance that she wanted, was no nearer happiness than had been Sylvia Weatherston. There were moments of intense excitement, it is true, and these she seized upon with feverish eagerness.

"My dear," Lady Rakesmire would say, "you little know your fortune, with no man to worry you with whims and fancies." This was well enough for the old lady, who had reached an age when the point of view has ceased to be emotional. But Sylvia thought far otherwise, as every year impressed her more with the measure of the loss she had sustained. Better, far better, a husband, even if she did not love him passionately, than a life as blank and void as hers.

It was one evening, as she dressed to go out to some dinner, that the explanation she had dreaded for so long took place. Neddie was in the room to say good-night, and watched the maid brush out the long, red hair. The boy admired his mother very much, and prized this short hour in the evening set apart for his especial benefit. On these occasions the two compared notes on the day, and told each other all that they had done. This time, however, when

the girl had gone, her son began to question Sylvia.

"Mother," he asked suddenly, "was father a bad man?"

A flush spread over the woman's face and neck at this inquiry.

"Why do you ask?" she said, sharply. "Has any one been speaking to you?"

The boy hesitated, not wishing to tell tales and get his nurse in trouble.

"I often hear them say that he is bad," he answered.

"If Annette said so she is a wicked girl," said Sylvia, hotly, "and Neddie must not mind her!"

"But is it true?" the child persisted. "Was father a bad man?"

In despair Sylvia glanced from her son at her reflection in the glass; but her face, troubled as it was, gave her no satisfaction. The moment that she knew must come confronted her at last.

"No, dear," she said, by way of gaining time; "he was not bad."

The doubt in the child's countenance was plain, and well the mother knew that this denial would not serve. Not only that, but once for all an explanation must be found to satisfy her son

for good; for Sylvia, as a mother, knew that once the boy was unconvinced, she would be open to these questions in the future.

"If father is good," continued the child, "why does he not come home?"

The mother faced her boy again. A way out of the difficulty had occurred to her, and a plausible excuse for the absence of her husband. Near them lived a Mrs. Hawleigh, the wife of an officer in India, and whose little son would often come and play with Neddie. What more natural than to suggest that Edward Dane was in a similar position?

"Why does not Freddie's papa come home?" asked Sylvia, alluding to Mrs. Hawleigh's son. "He is not bad, and yet he is obliged to stay away."

The child thought.

"But," he said, "Freddie talks about his father."

"Major Hawleigh is nearer, and can write more letters."

The boy was silent, the while his mother watched him anxiously in fear of some objection. Apparently her son was satisfied, and she gave a deep sigh of relief at his next question.

"Is father coming back?" he asked.

"Some time, dear."

"Before I am big?" the boy persisted.

"I hope so."

The words had left her lips before she realized the wish that they conveyed. Anxious at all hazard to set Neddie's mind at rest, she had not weighed the form of her reply. Involuntarily she had confessed the recent longings of her heart in an outspoken manner.

But when her son had left her, Sylvia remained there, ready dressed, and made no movement to go downstairs. Instead she forced herself to answer plainly in her mind the question hitherto evaded. Did she believe her husband to be guilty or not? She did not. Yet what had she done? She had taken advantage of what must have appeared her belief in his guilt to excuse her first outburst of anger, to conceal her love for another, and as an apology to the world at large for her attitude to Edward Dane the moment of the accident. Coward that she was, how readily she had accepted this construction every one had placed upon her conduct. She had been posing as the woman who believed her husband to be a murderer, but who did not wish

to make admission publicly to that effect. Mad with grief at the death of John Hewlett, she had turned on the innocent cause of his death in her passion.

And now her son would know all this. Sooner or later everything would come to light, and Neddie have to form a judgment on his mother.

In the long mirror which swung close by at hand, she caught sight of herself erect in a black dinner gown. Pearls were the stones upon her neck, and in her hair a white rose nestled. But on her face were fear, perplexity and sorrow.

Her features Sylvia knew by heart, and every wrinkle as it came. Her inner self she did not know, and, like a stranger in adversity, its presence was unwelcome.

Dry-eyed, she stood a moment quiet and still. Then, regardless of her dress and everything, she fell upon her knees by the bedside, and burst out into tears.

CHAPTER XV.

A good day's racing, followed by a decent dinner, what more can man desire? Given these two things, the world appears a pleasant place to live in, with both fun and money for the asking. Saunders could not believe a week had passed in London, so quickly had the days slipped by. Meetings at Sandown, Kempton and Hurst Park; new plays to see and old friends to greet; all this had fully occupied his time. Walking down Piccadilly, it was difficult for him to realize that he had ever been away. Yet not three weeks ago and he was listening to the band upon the plaza in that orange-laden air across the sea.

On calling at the club that morning, he had found a note awaiting him from Sylvia Dane. From it he learnt that she was now in Curzon Street, and would be pleased to see him. Her letter reminded Saunders of the journey he had made to Revolution, and of the meeting with her husband. How curious it was that of all men he

should be mixed up in what was at best a tragedy! Ever since the Churston days, the ups and downs and fortunes of these Danes had constantly pursued him. Surely they had chosen an odd confidant in trouble—a man who wished to have an easy time, and only cared for sport. Uncles and aunts, and other people whom he knew, lived quietly enough, but he himself had strange experiences.

And here he was, a link between two continents, and the one means of communication for a man and woman ill at ease. Should he, who had been bound up in the troubles of this family, and an unwilling spectator of their grief at times—should he, when so to say the curtain was rung down, be present at the close?

These thoughts accompanied him upon the way to Curzon Street and up to Sylvia's door. Waiting while they answered it, he considered how much he would tell her, and whether he should mention Dane. Perhaps it would be best to wait and see if she were anxious on the subject, for he was not bound to speak.

Their meeting was a cordial one, and Sylvia seemed pleased to see him. She had made herself most comfortable, so Saunders thought, as

he looked round. The furniture was all in white, and flowers stood in the windows and on the tables in the room. A pleasant hum of traffic in the distance reached them, not too near, but just suggestive of the town. Presently she asked her friend what he was doing, and if he had come home to stay.

"Bananas and rubber," replied Saunders, laconically. "Same place in Mexico from which I wrote last time."

Sylvia laughed.

"How funny it sounds!" she said, and then continued: "Do you remember our stay at Nice?"

"And de Préville?" said Saunders, smiling.

"Poor M. de Préville!" said Sylvia. "He was an amusing man."

As she was speaking, Saunders thought how well his hostess looked, and not as though she worried much. He hoped there might be no occasion to refer to Edward Dane at all, and felt thankful accordingly.

"And young hopeful?" he inquired. "How is he?"

"Oh, very well indeed, and you shall see him presently." Sylvia hesitated. "It was good of

you to think of him, and send those presents." Then she added: "I often wonder why you take such interest in him, and it is most kind."

"Don't mention it. Quite natural ——"

The drawing-room and its appointments sank before him, and gave place to a less conventional scene. Once more he stood within the forest clearing, and heard the father speak.

"You need not mind," said Sylvia, gently, "talking of these things to me. Many a time I think of my husband, and try and guess where he can be."

Had she read his thoughts, then, and should he tell her now, or not? Was ever easy-going man who hated sentiment like poison in such an awkward situation?

"Only the other day," she continued, "Neddie was asking me about his father. Soon he will have to know, and he had better learn from me."

Saunders decided it was only right to tell.

"Mrs. Dane," he began huskily.

The look in his face and the tone of his voice were sufficient.

"You know where he is?" Sylvia cried. "You have found him?"

"Yes," he replied; "I met your husband some years ago."

"And you never told me, and allowed me to remain in ignorance. Where is he? Tell me, and I will go to him."

The perspiration broke out upon the other's forehead, as he stood the image of perplexity. Dane's anger was as nothing in comparison to the wife's reproaches. To reveal the secret of her husband's place of refuge was impossible, without the man's permission.

"I have promised," began Saunders.

"Where is he?" Sylvia asked, unheeding the excuse.

"I cannot tell you," he answered, "without his consent."

"Say something," she continued, angrily. "Don't stand without a word like that!"

"Mrs. Dane," he implored, "one moment, and I will explain. Visiting the States, after I had left the service—where I may not tell you—I met your husband. Anxious as he was for news of Neddie, I volunteered to write from time to time and keep him well informed."

"And I?" said Sylvia, slowly. "What of me?"

Saunders paused. Sorry as he felt for her, the woman frightened him with her set face and words.

"I think," he said at last, "that the subject of his flight, and everything connected with it, was distasteful."

Sylvia understood.

"He hates me, is it not so?" she said. "He loathes the very mention of the woman who has driven him away?"

"Mrs. Dane, do not distress yourself," said Saunders. "Think, it is long since we met, and now he may have changed."

"But you write?"

"Only," he replied, "to forward him the letters you send me. Sometimes I add a line myself, but very seldom."

"He loves his boy and loathes his wife," repeated Sylvia.

There was an awkward silence. Painful as was this interview, Saunders did not like to leave her so cast down. Sylvia seemed absorbed in recollection, and the effort with which she roused herself was palpable.

"Mr. Saunders," she said at length, "I am a wicked woman."

He looked distressed.

"Please don't," he said. "You are upset, and I should not have spoken."

"You did right," replied Sylvia, "quite right, and I see myself at length for what I am—posing as an unfortunate woman all these years, when in reality I was a hypocrite and a murderess, in mind at least, if not in deed."

So, thought her listener, she had never really believed Dane to be guilty, after all.

Sylvia had risen, and now faced her visitor, with both hands twisting at her handkerchief in nervous fashion.

"There are things," she said, "no woman can explain—to a man. There were reasons. I was angry with my husband, and have been so many years. But"—and her voice sank—"now I see differently. The very name I threw at him applies to me."

"You must look after Neddie," said Saunders.

Sylvia smiled at the suggestion.

"Ah, Neddie!" she said. "If it were not for him I should seek a convent. As it is, we will go somewhere far away together, my boy and I." Presently she asked: "Shall you see my husband again?"

"No, Mrs. Dane; but I communicate with him."

"And you will give him a message from me?"

"Of course I will."

A writing table stood in the bay-window of the little drawing-room, and Sylvia placed a chair in front of it. Saunders sat down, and, pen in hand, looked up at her inquiringly.

"What shall I say?" he asked.

Say? What cannot a wretched woman say to ease her heart of trouble? Let her put down all that she felt, and those sheets should be crossed and re-crossed, and still much left unwritten. She would tell him all that she had suffered. That bitter moment in their lives should not be mentioned. Nothing but how she longed to be with him and comfort him herself.

"I will send this letter off at once," said Saunders, to awaken her attention; "then, no doubt, he will write to you direct."

Sylvia thought a moment.

"Tell him," she said, "that his wife always thinks of him, and hopes he will forgive her —"

"Yes," he said, writing.

"For the sake of their son," she went on.

"Is that all?" he asked her.

"For the sake of their son," repeated Sylvia.

"Yes, that is all."

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT Sylvia's message came too late. A dull resentment of the woman who had spoilt his life now filled the heart of Edward Dane, and if he thought of her at all, it was in connection only with his son. He merely sent back word to say that he forgave her, and then dismissed the matter from his mind. Had Saunders come once more to visit Revolution, he would have found his friend a different man, and one still further changed from the old playmate he had known at home. Young when he first arrived, and ready to receive a new impression, Dane had gradually absorbed the local life and sentiment about him.

From time to time he heard from Saunders, when suddenly the latter ceased to write or forward any letters. At first Dane put it down to some delay or accident, such as were frequent with the mail. But when months passed, and no word came from his friend, he grew restless and uneasy. Had something happened to his son, he

wondered, or was it that Saunders had been ill, and was incapable of writing? Several times he wrote to make inquiries, and received no answer in reply. Determined to find out about his child, the father thought of going home to England.

For throughout the length of these long years his thoughts had centered in his son. The affection for Sylvia, repulsed in early youth, had been transferred entirely to the boy, and the love he had once felt for the mother was now lavished on her child.

It was the custom on the claim for all the hands to mess together. Mrs. Grogan, wife of the manager, assisted by her daughter, did the cooking and what waiting was required. Here one day, as Dane sat down with others to his dinner, a mail at length arrived. There was nothing but a newspaper for him, and outside news possessed but little interest. Still, the meal finished, he took it up and opened it to pass away the time. Turning over the sheets, a paragraph scored in places caught his eye, and underneath it a few lines from Saunders: "Have been ill, and am going home. Will write." So far so good, and he proceeded to read through the print-

ed matter his attention had been called to. "On the 30th inst., after a short illness, Sylvia, wife of Edward Dane." He looked at the heading of the paper, and saw that it was quite eleven months old. Putting it down, his resolution to return occurred to him again.

So she had kept his name, and not disgraced it. The thought of her returned to him, not as his wife, but as the girl he knew before their marriage. Ah! to go back to that time. To pass the hours as children pass the hours, and as they did at Churston Rectory. To see her full of fun, and listen to that laugh of hers, which had no trouble in it.

He would return.

This notice of her death had come to him a second poster by the way of life, and in the manner of a photograph, which startles thought from long-forgotten places in the brain, and so itself is lost at once to consciousness. So with this woman he had taken to himself, the pallid face, the eyes that looked, her red-gold hair—all these had gone. But the recollection led him back through passages of pain, to meet with hope at last—his flesh and blood—his son, whom he must see again.

Dominant as this idea was in him now, the preparations for departure were soon made. He rose at once.

"Say, boys," he cried, "I go to-day!"

There was a murmur of surprise, and several of the men looked up. Mrs. Grogan, at the kitchen range, paused in her cooking, the while her daughter gazed at Dane in open-eyed astonishment.

"It is this way," he explained: "I have news from home."

There was a hush of expectation.

"I guess you've struck a job," said Mrs. Grogan.

"That's so," he said.

The others watched him curiously. Remittance men they knew well, and were accustomed to, but Dane was not that sort, and they had come to like him. A tenderfoot, a stranger to their ways at first, this man from out the old country was now a pal and one of themselves. Dimly it had been felt amongst them all along that some misfortune had befallen him. Yet never by a word or question had they sought to know what thing he might have done.

"We are real sorry," said one of them, at length.

This broke the ice, and voiced the general sentiment, as Dane grasped hands all round. It was a scene to be remembered, these grimy, flannel-shirted men grouped in the dark interior of the hut—the wondering women in the background—as they pressed about their comrade for a parting shake.

"Maybe, boys, I'll come back," said Dane, but knew it was improbable.

"That's the talk!"

"Well, so long!" he said.

"So long!" they all replied, and he had gone.

Leaving a message for Bob Grogan on the way, Dane walked straight to the shack he lived and slept in. There, from a box, he drew a roll of dollar bills he kept by him, and, hitching up his trousers, started out for Revolution.

Each mile upon this homeward journey had an interest in his eyes. It would remind him of that former tramp which he had made, when everything had been so strange and new, as fresh and vigorous as himself. A disappointment, too, to think the train would whirl him past those spots where he had camped in days gone by. To see them once again would have been pleasant, and from the windows of the car he tried to catch

a glimpse of the old route where, tired and footsore, he had walked. Those glorious mornings, he could see them still, and know the sun above his head and feel the sharp nip on the air. When the biscuits made and eaten, they would rise and begin once more the forward movement of the day. The distance now astonished him, and how he could have managed it on foot, with an occasional ride. Experienced as he was, this first effort on his part, out of condition as he must have been, and coming straight from Norbury, amazed him.

At New York he booked a berth, and went on board the first boat sailing. During the passage, the one thought of his son possessed him in the long interval of rest. Walking up and down the decks watching the foam upon the waves cast rippling from the side, the same idea was with him. The fear of recognition did not disturb him, for Neddie was the first consideration, and the father cared for little else beside.

Once more in the train, and this time in England, where to eyes tried by vast plains of grass and corn the homeliness of all around was comforting. Snug fields in quick hedges, small copses set with larch and oak, replaced the prai-

rie land and mountain range. The grandeur of the former scenes had vanished in the details of a smaller scheme.

And now he was so close at hand Dane could not keep his seat as he drew near his destination. Try as he would, excitement got the better of him, and would not be controlled. Luckily, there were no other passengers in the compartment with him, and so none to wonder at this gray-haired man, and all his trembling eagerness.

From Hinton station to "The Fox," where Dane intended to put up, was but a little distance by the fields. It took him pretty much the way that he had come with Sylvia that afternoon to see his father. The recognition they would meet with made them nervous then, and now he felt the same, but for another reason. What would his son be like? How bitter it would be to end the last search he could make in disappointment! Had he been wise to come back, after all? But, then, there were some things which left too long will eat the heart away, and this was one of them.

He reached the spot where he had stood with Sylvia that first time she caught sight of Norbury. Well did he remember her exclamations

of surprise, and her cries, half awe, half pleasure. How proud he had been to feel that all this was his to give her, and how amused at her astonishment! Still, he was here to see his son, and not to think of her—to say good-by forever to his boy, and leave such memories buried.

Dane put the hand-bag, which he carried, on the ground, to have another look about him.

"Fine day!"

A man dressed in the garb of keeper stood beside him on the path, who glanced first at the bag, then at its owner, with suspicion in his gaze. Dane guessed his thoughts, and was amused.

"You are one of the keepers?" he asked.

"I be."

The gruff reply expressed a keen desire to know the other's business. All at once Dane thought the man might prove of use in furthering a plan to see his son.

"They told me 'The Fox' inn was hereabouts," he said. "Can you direct me?"

The keeper unbent a little.

"That is the way I go," he replied. "You better come along of me."

They chatted for a little as they walked, and presently Dane said:

"It is good to be out here after travelling in the cars."

"Be you from America?" the man inquired.

All people from that continent were rich, he understood.

Dane nodded.

"Canada," he said. "And I want to see some shooting among the small birds here. I use a shot-gun often around my homestead."

"I can manage that," the other said, and brightened at the prospect of a tip. "To-day is Saturday. Squire has a small party of college gents, and such like, at the house for Monday—the first company there has been since mistress died. And if so be, sir," he added, "you will walk with me and with the beaters, I can bring ye."

The very thing to suit him, and the best means he could have for seeing Ned. Dane thanked the man.

"What is your name?" he asked.


"Bob Stone, sir."

And so this man was the under-keeper's son, and Dane looked at him with interest. Suggestive of so much, the name soon set him thinking, and the couple had no further words until they reached "The Fox."

CHAPTER XVII.

A SILENCE lay upon the countryside, now broken by the bells, now deepened in the pause between the peals. An air of expectation hung about the village street, filled as it was by stragglers on their way to church or chapel. To the inhabitants of Hinton, this was the social function of the week, and the one occasion on which to don their extra finery. Here, hurrying to the place of worship they most affected, were to be seen black, shiny broadcloth coats, escorting the wearers of bright ribbons bought last market day. Even those who did not venture in themselves, lounged at the gates to pass remarks upon and criticise the fashions.

Glad of an opportunity which thus left him free to walk about unnoticed, Edward Dane set out across the fields. He had waited the last half hour, watching from his window at "The Fox," until the bells ceased ringing. A hope that some one, perhaps his son, from Norbury might



attend the service kept him to the last moment. But he remembered that there was another church upon the Churston side, and probably the party had gone there instead. In any case, he determined to take a stroll about the place and see what changes had been made.

With this intention, Dane walked slowly forward, pausing as he came across a stile or gate to look about him. It was an almost perfect morning, very like that one when he had left his home, little dreaming of the consequences. At last he reached the park, and just within it, and with the house in sight between the trees, he stopped. Sinking on to the grass, he lay down at full length and lit his pipe. The landlord of the inn had promised him admission to the grounds of Norbury, by good-will of the gardener, a friend. But like an epicure who takes the pleasures of the table with deliberation, Dane had postponed this visit to the afternoon. Meanwhile, it was very pleasant resting here among the yellow oaks, beneath a cloudless sky, and to watch the shimmer on the water of the distant lake. Putting all thought of anything but what he saw away from him, Dane lay there drowsily. Presently the hum of insects buzzing round

him, and the cries of children playing in the hedges by, grew faint, then ceased. He was asleep.

Soon, and from near at hand, came the sound of voices, and the laugh of girls. Half a dozen young people of both sexes had reached the stile close by the sleeping man. The whole party of them, with the exception of one couple, got over and went on; but these two lingered, unobservant of their neighbor. Young Dane, for he it was, stood talking earnestly to his companion, a pretty girl with black eyes and hair. She was listening, glancing up and again at him, and laughing in his face from time to time. Presently, at something which the young man said, she turned away, and in so doing her eyes fell on the sleeper. She gave a cry of pity.

"Look at that poor man!" she exclaimed. "How tired he must be!"

Her companion glanced back sharply at the recumbent form. Accustomed to these vagrants and their petty pilferings, he did not fully share her sympathy.

"A tramp," he said, "from off the road. He has no business here, at any rate; but still, it seems hard luck to turn him out."

"Yes, indeed!" the girl replied. "Let him sleep, poor fellow!"

The young man took a few steps to where the other lay, and stood a moment looking down at him.

"I wonder who he is?" he said, half to himself. "You can see by his hands how hard he works. Well-dressed, too, for a man of that description."

The girl was at his shoulder.

"Oh! Ned," she said, "I feel so very sorry for him, somehow. He looks as though he had seen trouble."

That sigh which occasionally precedes awakening consciousness now left the sleeper's lips. His eyelids fluttered, and with open eyes the couple found him looking at them steadily. Starting, as though ashamed at being caught thus watching him, young Dane and his companion moved away. Half awake, the intruder sat up, following the lovers with his gaze as they grew smaller in the distance and disappeared from view. He rose to his full height and shook himself. That lad there was his son.

Of this Dane felt quite certain, and only wondered who the girl could be. And yet, what good purpose would that knowledge serve? So

that she loved Ned, and would make him happy, that was all he cared to know. Returning to "The Fox" inn later, he felt another man, and as if he, too, had shared their happiness.

Next day was such another as the Sunday which had passed. Nature, indeed, had smiled upon this venture, the last that Edward Dane would undertake. Over night he had arranged with Stone, the keeper, to meet the latter at a certain spot outside the village. It had been hard work to hide his knowledge of the place, and all the paths about, and to pretend an ignorance of short-cuts. On getting there at the appointed time, he found a mixed group of keepers, dogs and beaters awaiting the arrival of the guns. These latter, consisting of young Dane and his three guests, they made out presently, as all four approached from Norbury House. As they drew nearer, talking to and laughing with each other, the elder Dane observed them narrowly. Yes, this boy walking on a little way in front was his own son, and the lad whom he had seen yesterday. That middle-aged man just behind, he recognized as Saunders, and the other two must be the college friends whom Stone had mentioned.

Another moment and the two parties mingled, exchanging greetings. Dane withdrew a little from the crowd, and watched his son, who seemed, he noticed, quite at home discussing the arrangements for the day with the head keeper. Then, stick in hand, the father found himself at the end of a long line of beaters, slowly driving all the birds before them on the stubble. Beyond these close-cropped fields lay an expanse of roots, and once there the partridges would stay, until, disturbed again, they flew above the waiting guns.

From the hillside they were descending, Dane could see these latter standing ready for a shot. A little puff of smoke would rise from time to time, from one or other, and the reports would follow, ringing in their ears. Then, as the line of beaters drew yet closer, narrowing the distance between the shooters and themselves, the birds rose faster. Casual shots became a fusilade, as coveys skimmed from right to left and scattered overhead.

Time passed quickly in this manner, and the lunch hour came before Dane saw his son again. What excuse could he make to meet the lad and speak to him? the father wondered. He glanced

at Ned, with his companions sitting there a little distance off, unconscious of his scrutiny.

At length a way of meeting quietly with his son occurred to Dane, and seemed to be the simplest. Beckoning to Stone, he asked the latter who it was who carried cartridges for his young master. It turned out a boy had been told off for that purpose, and Dane suggested changing places with the lad. He was not so young as he had been, and would be glad to take a rest, so he explained. The keeper readily assented, and on resuming shooting, Dane found himself in close attendance on his boy.

Father and son, they stood beside each other filled with very different thoughts. The latter, all eyes and attention for the sport; and the former, watching, silent and intent.

How well he shot, much better than he himself had ever done, the elder man remarked. That right and left, for instance, was as good as you could wish to see; and the boy's whole soul seemed wrapped up in his occupation. Should he disturb this lad, so young and happy, by a single word? Because his own existence had been spoiled, should he then cast a shadow on another's? On him, too, whom he loved most in

the world? Once he spoke the whole weary business would be reopened, and either he would have to fly or damage this lad's life. Surely that would be a cowardly thing to do, and he shrank from the idea. Firm and resolute, Edward Dane made up his mind for once and all upon the subject. That very evening he must go away and leave the boy in peace.

A lull had taken place between the beats, and helping to pick up the birds, Dane rubbed shoulders with his son. The latter noticed him directly.

"A stranger, are you not?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the other, trying vainly to control his voice.

"I thought I had seen you before," the lad continued, "in the park yesterday."

Now that he was in the presence of his son, and talking face to face, the father felt that it was more than he could bear. He could not trust himself much longer, he was sure. If only he could get away and breathe fresh air.

Something of this had shown upon his face, for suddenly young Dane exclaimed:

"Hold up, man. Here, take a pull at this!" and he forced a flask upon the other.

The spirits took immediate effect, and for a moment rallied him. Dane the elder lifted up his head and straightened himself up. With an effort he looked the other in the face and handed back his property.

"Thank you," he said.

Still young Dane gazed at him doubtfully, for the man seemed ill, with a strange, queer look about the eyes. However, he had done all that was possible, and it was time to rejoin his friends. Bidding the elder man good-evening, the lad set out to follow Saunders and his other guests. Ten yards had he gone, when a groan struck on his ears and caused him to turn round. The man was still standing there in the same position.

"Did you speak?" he called out. "Can I do anything?"

There was a moment's silence.

"Don't you mind," the answer came at length; "it is nothing."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE victory was won, and Ned had gone away unknowing and unsuspecting. But this success in fair fight against himself had cost him very dear. Putting a hand up to his forehead, Dane drew it from him wet. It was all over, the trouble and the pain, and nothing now remained for him but death. His hand crept to his pocket and fingered the revolver which lay hidden there.

What child's play it had been for him to think that he could see his son and go. Such a course was impossible now he had seen the lad and heard him speak. His hand was stayed so far as not to spoil the other's life, but he could well dispose of that which was his own, and kill himself.

There was sufficient daylight left for him to see by, to make a kind of survey, so to speak, of a familiar scene before attempting new and untrod ground. Dane found a gate which gave a wider view of house and grounds, and of the plantations which surrounded them.

What better spot could he have chosen, or time, or opportunity? What earthly object could be served in living on? His son would marry and have children, while he himself was of no good to any one. A prisoner, he had been confined in dim, gray walls, whose surface he tapped, searching. But the search had been long and had tired him, and the delay had wearied him; and he had grown impatient of it all. Best to make an end of it at once, here in the place where he was born.

His death would inconvenience no one, he reflected, and least of all his son. His identification was impossible, for not a shred upon him bore the name of Edward Dane. At "The Fox" inn, too, in case of future questions, they had an answer ready—"Mr. Thompson," from the colonies, who had arrived last Saturday, and who had occupied two rooms.

No clew was left to guide them, and he might as well proceed; finger on trigger, he raised his hand up to a level with his head.

"Neddie!"

It was Sylvia's voice, and Dane lowered his arm slowly.

"Neddie!" it came again.

Yes. She used to call him that before the time of pain. Curious that a casual sound like this should find the weakest spot.

There was a pause, and then the noise of feet. It seemed to him the speaker must have met the much-desired companion, for low tones now reached his ears.

"Yes, I love you!"

His head drooped, and the revolver swung slowly to and fro between his knees. This was the girl, he supposed, out walking with his son the day before, and now she had met Ned coming home.

Breathlessly he crept up to the hedge and peered out upon the other side. There they were, his son and sweetheart, that dark girl whom he had seen in Norbury Park. They might have been mistaken for himself and Sylvia, he thought, as they had walked there long ago.

What was this thing which he had been about to do? To sacrifice these years of self-control, and to surrender at the last in this humiliating fashion? To come back whining like a cur, to finish as a mountebank?

Under the influence of this fresh thought the very landscape changed before him. Norbury,

his old home, sank in his view, and on the self-same site arose a little shanty buried in the quiet of the forest. There, undisturbed by vain regrets, his future days should pass.

He would like to send a message to his son. No doubt it might affect the latter for a little while, but the lad could surely spare him a few minutes, and he would ask no more. Just a line to Ned to say that he had seen him and was pleased. Later, it might be a satisfaction to the boy to know his father had not been a stranger to him quite. Yes, he would do this. A few words, nothing more.

Through the village and back to the inn he walked, a strange elation on him. The days were shortening, and the bar was full of customers fresh from their work out in the fields. Between the drifting clouds of tobacco smoke, mine host loomed, an imposing and perspiring personage. At Dane's appearance the hum of conversation fell a moment, and mugs of ale were held suspended in the air. The colonial gent was an object of much curiosity to them and excited their attention. Leaving a message with the landlord for Bob Stone, Dane sought his little sitting-room.

The letter would not take him long to finish, for the words were already written in his brain. He snatched a sheet of paper and began to write. The letters, formed in haste and in anxiety, became long sentences as he continued. Pausing to rest, he looked amazed and startled, for it was his life that lay before him in those lines. He tore it up, as it would never do to send his son a ragged sketch like that. Only a few words were necessary for him to say to put the thing in shape, and these he wrote accordingly.

But the room was close and confined, and he left it for the open air outside. Sitting beneath the big elm, which stood in solitary grandeur before the house, he waited for the keeper.

The latter soon made his appearance, and Dane explained what he wished done.

"Listen," he said. "Give this letter to your master, and come back here at once. If Mr. Dane should ask you any questions, tell him that I am now leaving Hinton. That will be true enough, for the moment you return, I go; but try, if possible, to get away immediately. I shall wait," he added, "here for you."

To stimulate the intelligence of his messenger,

Dane slipped a thumb into his waistcoat pocket; an action which the other understood.

He watched the keeper disappear, and then strolled in the direction of the church. It had occurred to him to go and see the spot where they had placed his wife. Not from any morbid curiosity, or to give way to futile grief, but simply because this was the last chance he should get.

Gently, as if afraid to awaken those beneath, he moved among the mounds of the churchyard toward the corner where the Dane vault lay. The recent marks of the interment were effaced, or, if they did exist, he could not see them in the twilight.

Another second, and he stood close by the grave and spelt her name inscribed upon the slab. Her troubles were over, and so were his. A natural disease had taken her away, and, in any case, had things been different, she would be lying there the same. And he himself, would it have mattered much to him, for was he not about to end his days in peace? And if some miracle could be performed, and in a manner Sylvia brought to life again, he felt that she, too, would think like this—to know that when you died you left behind a generation happy and content—to

stand aside when the right moment came, and to be at rest and wait.

Returning to the place of his appointment by the elm, the village lights were twinkling. From inside the cottages, glimpses of the homes within appeared as separate pictures. Imagination brought to mind the figures of Mrs. Grogan and her daughter, and Dane smiled with pleasure at the welcome he would get. His old pals, too—it would be good to be with them again.

He had not long to wait. Once more, and for the last time, he met the keeper.

"You delivered the letter?" he asked.

"I gave it into the Squire's own hands," replied the man.

"Thank you."

Dane stood thinking.

"A fine fellow, is he not?" he asked abruptly of the other.

"Yes, sir."

Stone liked his master well enough, but abstract enthusiasm was another matter and beyond him.

"And shoots well?" Dane continued, eagerly.

"Squire ain't so bad," the keeper acknowledged. "Wants practice, though. Now, that

other gent, Mr. Saunders, he can shoot, he can."

"Indeed," Dane answered, carelessly.

Tommy was always pretty useful, he remembered. He placed some money in the other's hand.

"Good-night," he said, and walked away.

So abrupt was the movement on his part, that Dane had gone some distance down the road before the keeper noticed that he was in earnest going.

"Hi, mister," he shouted out, "that ain't the way to Churstonbury."

But there was no reply. For a little while Bob Stone stood stock still, with his eyes fixed in the direction taken by the other. A look of cunning swept by slow degrees upon his vacant countenance, and at once he dived into his capacious pockets. Bringing up the money Dane had just given him, he bit the coins to see if they were good.

CHAPTER XIX.

DINNER—that stage effect of private life—was over. Candles were the only lights, and these upon the table made the white cloth shine beside the dark surroundings. Ned and his companions appeared as figures in half shade; while in the deeper shadow at their backs the portraits on the walls, like yellow ghosts, looked down upon the living.

The ladies had just left the room, and the men were closing up across the empty chairs. In answer to a mute appeal upon the other's face, Saunders moved into a vacant seat beside his host. Pale and ill as was the older man, he formed a striking contrast to young Edward Dane, to whom he seemed frail by comparison.

"Capital day, Ned," he remarked, as he sat down; "best sport I have had in some time."

The lad smiled with pleasure, and glanced down the table at his guests, to see that they were occupied and had what they required.

"Glad you think so," he said, and turned toward his friend.

"What was the bag?" asked Saunders.

"Sixty brace, one hundred and fifty head about, I think," young Dane replied; "but we shall know for certain presently."

They lit their cigarettes.

"I see you have old Stone's son with you now," continued Saunders.

"Yes, the father is getting a bit shaky, and Bob will take his place in time. By the by," and the remembrance made Dane hesitate, "did you notice a fellow who was beating—tall man he was, and had a beard?"

"Can't say I did," the other replied. "Your village worthies are so much alike."

"Rum-looking beggars, are they not?" Dane assented. "Still, the chap I mean is not a native, but a visitor."

"Well?"

"The man interested me, somehow," continued the lad; "so I made inquiries in the village, and found out all about him. He is a Canadian, it seems, and has been staying at 'The Fox.' "

A possibility so vague he could not seriously

consider it, but which at the same time disconcerted him, occurred to Saunders.

"What," he asked, "did you say this man was like?"

"Oh! put a beard on me," the young fellow said, "and there you have him, except, of course, he is much older."

This description, which would answer for the elder Dane so well, unsettled Saunders greatly. But, no! the father was out there some thousand miles away, working in the mine at Revolution.

"As I said," continued Dane, "for some reason or other the man interested me, and we had a chat."

"Yes?" said Saunders, with less indifference than before.

"We had not spoken long, if I remember right, before my friend was taken ill. He turned as yellow as a guinea—poor old chap!—and had a drink I gave him. What the matter with him was, exactly, it was impossible to guess."

These remarks recalled a sequence of events which Saunders hoped had been at last forgotten, commencing from the time when Dane had fled from England up to the moment he him-

self had left Mexico. In accordance with that promise to the other at the "Chorus Girl," he had kept the father well informed about his son by forwarding the letters he received. To all intent and purpose this arrangement answered admirably, and had been long continued. Then came a day when sickness had overtaken him, and made a break in all his plans. Visiting the Gulf in the hot season to superintend a new plantation, he had caught the fever, and, incapable of any mental effort in his illness, all correspondence was neglected. Well again, he found, to his surprise, that Sylvia had not written, and, knowing Dane's anxiety, he waited in suspense for news. None came except a notice of her death, which he had gathered from a newspaper and forwarded to Dane. And now, should he tell this boy all that he knew, or wait until the father chose to write himself? But he was getting older, Saunders felt, and hated trouble more and more. For once a proverb came to serve his turn in need, and to provide him with decision: "Let sleeping dogs lie."

"Sometimes," young Dane was saying, "when I see a man down on his luck like that, I think of my own father. What has he been doing all

this time, and where can he be now? It seems so odd, sitting here with everything I want, when he, perhaps, is having a bad time."

Saunders shifted in his chair uneasily, and helped himself to wine with an unsteady hand. Once he had had those very thoughts about his friend himself.

A few chords—a pause—then notes which rose and fell in melody.

Saunders looked up, relieved. This interruption was a welcome one, and internally he thanked the person playing.

"Who is that?" he asked, affecting ignorance.

"Nellie," and young Dane brightened at the name.

"Well, Ned, I suppose that is all settled?" his friend pursued, "and that we may congratulate you?"

"Yes. We shall be married, so I hope, at least, by Christmas."

"Capital! Now for her health, and for yours."

So saying, Saunders raised his glass, and the two men shook hands.

This friendly toast was scarcely honored, when an altercation from the other end drew their at-

tention. One of the younger men, a college friend of Dane's, was busy chaffing Rice, the doctor. The old man, as was his custom, had been laying down the law, and emphasising it upon the table.

"Ah! doctor," said his tormentor, "we saw you, to-day, winking at that girl in that discreditable fashion."

"In my parish, you young jackanapes," replied the doctor, and the glasses round him sang, "the girls first wait for me to wink at them."

There was a roar of laughter. They were still laughing when a footman entered and spoke a few words to his master.

"All right." Young Dane rose up from his chair. "Excuse me, you fellows, for a moment."

On his way to the door he could not help thinking of Rice, and feeling amused at the old doctor. Good chap enough he was, but made himself a bit too cheap.

Outside, the hall was only partly lit by lamps, which brought to light a picture or a cabinet at intervals. In the centre, by the great staircase and its broad flight of steps, Dane found the under-keeper waiting.

"That you, Stone?" he said, as he approached the man. "Good sport we had to-day. I never knew so many birds upon that beat before."

"Yes, sir."

Bob Stone seemed ill at ease, and stood there twisting the cap he carried in his fingers. Then, fumbling in his pockets, he produced a note and handed it to Dane.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "for disturbing you like this at dinner time. One of the beaters asked me to give you this, and I could scarce refuse to do his bidding. He were main troubled about it."

His master took the note mechanically, and, thumb in envelope, watched Stone walk down the hall in the direction of the servants' quarters.

"Wait a bit," he cried out after him; "it may want an answer."

But evidently the keeper did not hear him, for as Dane called, he heard the other close the door behind him.

One of the beaters. All at once he remembered the man he had just spoken of, and the recollection coming now disturbed him. Nonsense. What the devil could he have to write about to

him? He tore the letter open and began to read.

"My dear son."

He drew away and rubbed his eyes. Was he drunk, or dreaming? A sick and troubled feeling rose in his bewilderment. He spread the sheet of paper out upon the table near, and set himself to read again.

"My dear son, I have seen you. I have spoken to you. I am happy; content to leave you and go. It was not like this with me always, but now I feel differently. The couple of days passed here have made a great change in me, and in the way I look at things. I came a broken-hearted man, but I leave the place a happy one, because I have seen you, and I am pleased with you. About myself you have been told. It was a mistake; that was all. But now, my dear son, I want you to be happy and forget me. Do not try to find me; you will not succeed. My home is a shack of the pines which stand by it, and my friends are the friends of the new country. To them I am the man who came with nothing but the coat upon his back. To them I shall return. God bless you, my son—good-by."

Some one—a long way off, it seemed to be—

had opened the dining-room door. A gust of noise swept out and past him where he stood. A murmur of voices hushed as it was closed again.

The letter, lying there as he had read it, on the table, was blurred and indistinct to him.







